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Dickens and Democracy

with the publication of Charles Dickens' original MS. on

"THE CONDITION OF THE WORKING CLASSES,"

together with his original Letter to Dr. Southwood Smith on

"THE CONDITION OF THE POOR"

Democracy on Trial

To-day Democracy may be said to be on its trial. Democratic government has been adopted by Britain and other of the great civilised countries of the world; and while it cannot yet claim to have achieved all its ideals, or anything approaching all of them, its successes are considerable and its progress marked.

In the early part of Queen Victoria's reign the Democrats were considered to be the advanced party in political life. They were the extremists of their day. In the present century the Democrats are regarded as the moderate element, while their place on the extreme left has been taken by the Communists.

The new party, which has assumed the title of the party of progress, bearing the name of Socialists, with a Communistic tail, has outrun Democracy. The old creed has proved too slow for them. The liberties which they have gained under its flag have made them impatient. They desire to accelerate the rate of progress towards an idealistic state. They believe that they can reach the millennium by a short cut, instead of persevering on the long but sure road along which Democracy is moving.

The new creed does not inspire general confidence; and many who are sincere advocates of a happier state for man on earth, view it with the gravest misgiving. These thinkers are satisfied with the immense progress made by Democracy in the last half-century. They acknowledge that the road still to

be traversed is long and difficult, but they aver that the achievements of the past justify the belief that the goal will eventually be reached. On the other hand, they have seen the new system tried in a great European country and ending in tragic disaster, multiplying the great ills which it set out to cure.

Could the great pioneers of Democracy return to earth now that the trial of their faith has come, they would assuredly be gratified with the gains that have been made. No doubt, here and there, they would find cause for criticism, but in the main they would consider that their preaching had not been in vain. Most assuredly they would advise continued loyalty to the democratic expedient and condemn its desertion for fantastic creeds.

It is well, in this momentous era, to review once more the arguments and principles of the great Democrats who have passed, to remember their passionate loyalty and unwavering faith, and to give them credit for their foresight and perception. Among them, no figure is more important or picturesque than that of Charles Dickens. Being pre-eminently a novelist, he holds a position which is unique in the history of the propagation of Democracy. Although he ploughed a lonely furrow, although he did not enter the political world, or control a party machine, yet his work for Democracy was as important and effectual as any that came before or after him.

The following pages are a review of Dickens as a Democrat. As an author much has been written of him, for he gained for himself a pre-eminence in literature which is shared by few, and won an abiding place in the hearts of the English-speaking peoples. His influence on the march of Democracy is, perhaps,

vaguely acknowledged by his readers, who know how he espoused the cause of the poor and fought tyranny and oppression with the naked fist ; but it requires to be stated in more definite and emphatic terms.

An attempt has been made by the author to show how Dickens was fitted by temperament and character to be a pioneer of democratic views. His great humanity and wonderful sympathy, extending to all classes, are essential traits in those who fight the battle of the people as a whole. He had no choking prejudices or misdirected loyalties, such as inspire an obstinate refusal to consider beneficial change. He possessed the progressive mind, and used it on Democracy's behalf with far-reaching results. Like all enlightened thinkers, he was a great believer in education, seeing therein the true remedy for most complicated human difficulties.

The author is happy to be able to publish an original letter of Dickens to Dr. Southwood Smith, the sanitary reformer, as well as an original manuscript on the working classes.

A chapter has been included comparing the Democracy of our day with that in the time of Dickens ; and the advance recorded is seen to be so tremendous, that it justifies a continued reliance on true, democratic principles.

Charles Dickens' Original Letter to Dr. Southwood Smith on "The Condition of the Poor"

The original letter of Charles Dickens to Dr. Southwood Smith, published here for the first time, may be placed conveniently at the commencement of this work, because it is a characteristic utterance on his democratic views.

Dr. Smith was a well-known sanitary authority of the early Victorian age, and, as an ardent social reformer, found that his views met with a sympathetic response from the novelist. They had also in common their love of amateur theatricals, which made them firm friends.

Dr. Smith, it seems, had submitted to Dickens a suggestion for the limitation of working hours; but in those days there were no powerful Trades Unions to maintain a living wage for a shortened working day, and Dickens rightly feared that a curtailment would mean a drop in earnings, which the people of the hungry 'forties could ill afford.

Devonshire Terrace,
1st February, 1843.

My dear Dr. Smith,

I have read the enclosed with great pain, and with a foreknowledge of its entire truth.

I fear, however, that I cannot take up the subject.

Firstly and mainly, because I am freely engaged in doing my best for similar objects by different means.

And secondly because this question involves the whole subject of the condition of the mass of people in this country.

And I greatly fear that until Governments are honest, and Parliaments pure, and great men less considered, and small men more so, it is almost a cruelty to limit even the dreadful hours and wages of Labour which at this time prevail.

Want is so general, distress so great, and poverty so rampant—it is in a word so hard for the million to live by any means, that I scarcely know how we can step between them and one weekly farthing.

The necessity of a mighty change I clearly see and yet I cannot reconcile it to myself to reduce the earnings of any family—their means of existence being now so very scant and spare.

I shall be very glad to see the evidence and to have an opportunity of studying it. It will not fall on rocky ground if you send it here I think.

Always faithfully yours,

CHARLES DICKENS.

DR. SOUTHWOOD SMITH.

Dickens, the Humanitarian

In whatever phrases a Democrat may be described, it will be admitted that one essential in any person laying claim to the title, is an intense love for his fellow-men. In the immortal definition of Lincoln, Democracy is "Government of the people, by the people, for the people." It follows that no man who has not the interests of the people at heart can range himself sincerely beneath the democratic banner. To be a humanitarian it is not necessary to see only the virtues in one's brothers, closing one's eyes to their vices. Rather is it one's duty to give praise where praise is due, and to mete out criticism in a kindly spirit, without malice or self-glorification, where such criticism is likely to be a real help. Still less is it a part of the humane Democrat to affirm that one class, the more unfortunately placed as regards material circumstances, have a monopoly of goodness, while another, happier in the extent of their possessions, must necessarily be deficient in moral principles. Democracy is not sectarian. It is a system which recognises the rights of all and aims at protecting the liberties of all classes of society without favour or preferment. It abhors the domination of one grade to the detriment of another; it opposes the encroachment of one party upon the rights and freedom of another; but it does not attempt to produce absolute equality when Nature herself has fashioned human beings with such glaring inequalities in physical,

moral, and mental endowments. Democracy does not waste its breath in pursuing impossible ideals, but contents itself with being severely practical, applying itself to the needs of the moment, and proceeding slowly and surely in the gradual process of evolution. It has been a necessary and pleasing result of the growth of democratic principles that those, who have been deprived of their rights and privileges in the past and kept in a state of unhealthy subjection, should begin to enjoy the good things of life to which they are entitled; and the greatest boon that Democracy confers is the opportunity to rise, if the ability and inclination to do so are there. In the first flush of liberty it is, perhaps, natural for the emancipated to run to extremes and to believe that because they have won something, they should have all. But this would be retrogression and not progress, merely substituting the rule of one class for the rule of another, and introducing a new body of persecuted men and women to take the place of the old. This is not Democracy, which aims at slaying persecution and establishing universal content and freedom.

Your true Democrat, then, must love his fellow-men, whether they be rich or poor, high or low, intellectual or stupid. He will naturally feel a balance of sympathy for those in trouble and be conscious of a desire to help them. He will hate wrong and injustice whomsoever it attacks, and will pity an aching heart, whether it beats in anguish in a stately mansion or a squalid slum. Riches do not necessarily make happiness, although the lack of money may be a bar to joy. The real humanitarian will be guided whither sorrow lies. He will bestow his encouragement where it is most needed, having no class prejudices, and hating

only wickedness and evil. Such is expected of the humanitarian and such is expected of the Democrat. Democracy and humanitarianism therefore go hand in hand.

Charles Dickens was one of the greatest humanitarians who ever trod the globe. His writings throb with love for his fellow-man. Always he is ready to extol the virtues; and even in the characters which are not held up to our admiration, there is generally a saving grace, which prevents the reader from dismissing them as wholly bad. Those characteristics which he admired—honesty, justice, charity, sympathy—he has personified in such famous people as John Browdie, the Cheeryble Brothers, Peggotty and Ham, John Peerybingle, Tim Linkinwater, and Captain Cuttle, to mention but a few. His love for his fellows, however, did not prevent him from smiting hip and thigh all pride, avarice, oppression, and hypocrisy, which he saw only too well were working against the happiness of mankind in general. Dombey, Stiggins, Uriah Heep, Mr. Pecksniff, Mantalini, and many others were all created to teach the great lesson that one cannot live for one's own benefit alone, but that the consideration of others is a duty which falls on all. In his novels the good are always rewarded, and the bad are either overwhelmed by their wickedness or reformed by salutary suffering.

Where there is interest, there is observation; and Dickens' wonderful power of observing human character proves his sympathy with his fellow mortals. This gift of the great novelist was not acquired, but was natural with him, although he took pains to develop it during his passage through life. As a child he was impressionable, and people whom he met in his very

early years are reproduced in his books with their main characteristics intact. It is not necessary to extend consideration of this point. No one can read his works without being astonished at the faithful representation of well-known types of humanity. His powers of observation are not questioned; and the emphasis is laid on the proof they offer of his interest in, and love of, his brother and sister humans.

Dickens had enormous faith in mankind and was not blinded by the mist of ignorance or the screen of rags from seeing the gold in the soul of man. He did not believe that even the heaviest trials and difficulties could smother inherent goodness. Speaking at Edinburgh in June, 1841, he said:

> I was anxious to show that virtue may be found in the by-ways of the world; that it is not incompatible with poverty and even with rags.

He emphasised this point still further when replying to the toast of his health on the occasion of his visit to Boston in 1842. These were his words:

> I believe that Virtue shows just as well in rags and patches as she does in purple and fine linen. I believe she dwells rather oftener in alleys and by-ways, than she does in courts and palaces.

And again, in the same speech, he said:

> These creatures have the same elements and capacities for goodness as yourselves; they are moulded in the same form and of the same clay; and, though ten times worse than you, may, in having retained anything of their original nature amidst the trials and distresses of their conditions, be ten times better.

Another characteristic utterance was given by him at the Society of Artists, Birmingham, in 1853, when he told his audience :

> What the working class have found me towards them in my books, I am throughout my life. Whenever I have tried to hold up to admiration their fortitude, patience, gentleness, and the reasonableness of their nature, so accessible to persuasion, and their extraordinary goodness towards one another, I have done so because I have first genuinely felt that admiration myself.

As a humanitarian Dickens knew the people who most needed his sympathy and most deserved his help. The direct utterances which have been quoted prove his intense feeling for the sufferings of the poor. It was to them that his heart turned, as it must in any man who assumes the democratic label. But he had no prejudices in favour of the bottom dog, which blinded him to the good points in the higher grades of society. He did not believe a man was necessarily bad because he had possessions, nor did he think that want was a necessary breeder of virtue. Exactly the reverse. He was careful to emphasise the shortcomings of those he loved, and to show how they might be helped to cure them by an improvement in their conditions. In his own day, when Democracy was young, Dickens was considered to be advanced in his views. To-day, when Socialism is preached, when a Socialist Government holds office in England, and when the ugly spectre of militant Communism is hovering in the background, the novelist would certainly be classified as moderate. The reason is that he was a true Democrat, as opposed to Socialist and

Communist. He sympathised more with the poor, because he considered their hardships were a monstrous imposition upon them, but he would never have agreed that these hardships should be transferred to another class instead of being eliminated altogether. That, however, is what has happened in the socialistic experiment in Russia.

At Drury Lane in 1855 he said :

> I wish to avoid placing in opposition those two words, aristocracy and people. I am one who believes in the virtues of both, and would not deprive either of a single just right belonging to them.

Again, in Birmingham in 1844, he said :

> I look forward to the time when high and low, rich and poor, shall mutually assist each other.

There spoke the humanitarian, the man who understood that the brotherhood of man could only be achieved by the policy of love and give and never by that of hate and take. That is where Democracy differs from the modern creed, and that is the reason why Democracy has certain definite achievements to place against the reaction to tyranny, evidenced in the only country where the extremist experiment has been tried. It does not follow that Dickens would have been satisfied with what Democracy has done up to the present day. He would not ; but he would have been grateful for the advances made, as he was grateful for those made in his own lifetime, and for which he was to a large extent responsible. While a single case of injustice or hardship remained, he would be restless to press forward ; but he would never have flown to impossible expedients. He would survey the

history of Democracy and realise that its successes justified the nation in persevering with it. The novelist was too great a student of human nature to harbour the impossible belief that the millennium could be reached at a single bound.

Dickens was able to enter into the lives of the poor and oppressed more fully than most great men by reason of the chequered experiences of his own youth. These experiences, particularly his life at the blacking factory at Hungerford Stairs, are described fully in "David Copperfield," the novel being to a great extent an autobiography. But his sympathy was not confined to pity for their trials and difficulties. The true humanitarian does not concentrate on one side only of life and character. He understood their joys as well as their sorrows. He could laugh with them as readily as he could cry. There is as much sympathy in the joyous description of the Christmas revels of the Cratchit family as in that of the expulsion of Little Nell and her grandfather from the Old Curiosity Shop, their home. But he realised that the balance of sympathy was required for sorrow, and beneath the fun and satire there is always a solemn note which compels attention and causes the serious man to think. He used his great gift of humour to impress a grave truth upon the reader, for he knew that laughter is often very near to tears and that pathos may be expressed by a smile. Turning to "Our Mutual Friend," we read:

> A stray personage of meek demeanour mentioned that some half-dozen people had died in the streets from starvation. It was clearly ill-times after dinner. "I don't believe it," said Mr. Podsnap,

putting it behind him. The meek man was afraid it must be taken as proved, because there were the Inquests and the Registrar's return.

"Then it was their own fault," said Mr. Podsnap.

The following quotation from "Martin Chuzzlewit" is also illustrative:

Mr. Pecksniff said grace—a short and pious grace, invoking a blessing on the appetites of those present and committing all persons who had nothing to eat, to the care of Providence: whose business (so said the grace in effect) it clearly was to look after them.

It was not merely with the actual privations of the poor that Dickens was so sympathetic. He pitied their narrowness of outlook, their lack of opportunity for advancement and improvement, their ignorance, and the enormous handicap under which they faced the battle of life. He pitied, as much as anything else, the monotony of their existence.

"Look how we live," said Stephen Blackpool in "Hard Times," "an' where we live, an' in what numbers, an' by what chance, and wi' what sameness; and look how the mills are awlus a-goin', and how they never works us no higher to any dis'ant object—'ceptin' awlus, Death."

He knew only too well, for he had experienced it himself, the mixed feelings of utter pessimism and undying hope, which are the lot of those chained to grinding toil. If any further quotation is necessary to prove the intense compassion of Dickens, it may be taken from his speech at a soirée of the members of the Manchester Athenæum in October 1843, when he

spoke of his willingness to conduct unsympathetic or apathetic people—

> into certain gaols and nightly refuges I know of, where my own heart dies within me when I see immortal creatures condemned without alternative or choice, to tread, not what our great poets call the primrose path to the everlasting bonfire, but one of jagged flints and stones.

Great as his sympathy was with people of all ages and conditions, perhaps there is no case in which it is more clearly demonstrated than in his dealings with children. He understood every phase of child life, and pleaded for them with an eloquence that only a heart of stone could resist. In "Oliver Twist" he attacked the iniquitous treatment of children in public institutions; in Sally Brass's servant, the Marchioness, he awakened pity for the child drudge; in Florence Dombey he dealt with lack of parental affection; in Paul Dombey he showed the folly of trying to stuff a sensitive and delicate child with learning; and in Steerforth he instanced a life wrecked by the misdirected love of a mother. The instances could be multiplied many times to illustrate the breadth of Dickens' sympathy with the helpless.

The novelist stood for giving every boy and girl the opportunity to enjoy the good things of life. His mind revolted at the idea that these good things should be the privilege of certain classes only. Whether it was knowledge or whether it was enjoyment, he desired to put it within reach of all. At certain of his public readings he requested that a number of the working class should be admitted free. Always they were in his mind, and he never missed an opportunity

of referring to them in sympathetic terms. Speaking at the Birmingham Polytechnic in 1844 he said :

> I have peculiar ground for satisfaction that the resolutions to be proposed do not contain in themselves anything of a sectarian or class nature.

One of the most humane passages in literature occurs in Dickens' preface to the " Pickwick Papers," where he writes :

> Who knows, but by the time the series reaches its conclusion, it may be discovered that there are even magistrates in town and country, who should be taught to shake hands every day with common-sense and Justice ; that even poor laws may have mercy on the weak, the aged, the unfortunate : that schools on the broad principle of Christianity are the best adornment for the length and breadth of this civilised land ; that prison doors should be barred on the outside, no less heavily and carefully than they are barred within ; that the universal diffusion of common means of decency and health is as much the right of the poorest of the poor, as it is indispensable to the safety of the rich and of the State ; that a few petty boards and bodies—less than drops in the great ocean of humanity, which roars about them—are not forever to let loose fever and consumption on God's creatures at their will, or always keep their jobbing little fiddles going for a Dance of Death.

If there were ever any doubt about the humanity of Dickens this passage would dispel it ; but there is no doubt. The man or woman who has read one only of his novels cannot remain unconvinced of it. As a

novelist he spoke to the world principally through his characters, but he spoke directly, too, in public speeches in all the great centres of England and Scotland and on the western side of the Atlantic. Sufficient quotations from his direct utterances, as well as references to his books, have been given to prove that Dickens possessed the first requirement of a Democrat, an all-absorbing love for his fellows, and not for a section of mankind only, but for mankind as a whole, for all grades and classes. His sympathy was greater where it was more needed, but Dickens was broad in view, as the true humanitarian must be. He did not limit his affection and understanding. It was less for the more fortunate classes, and the characters drawn from them are, perhaps, not so happy as those of the middle and working classes But he recognised their importance and necessity to the State and would not deprive them of anything to which they were justly entitled. He saw no reason why all classes should not live together in mutual affection and esteem, helping and assisting each other to make the life of the nation smooth and prosperous. That is the aim and purpose of Democracy.

Dickens' Work for Democracy

Many people, who aspire to the titles of humanitarian and Democrat, possess a kind of slumbering sympathy with the poor and oppressed, which does not awake any real depth of feeling. They condemn oppression and injustice in a vague way, but do not appear to consider them as any personal concern of their own, and would stoutly deny that they bore any responsibility for them. The truth, however, is that so long as trials and difficulties, misery and poverty, remain in the world, every individual has a divine mission to assist in removing them. It is easy to shut one's eyes, like Mr. Podsnap, to what is unpleasant; but a host of people, much more worthy than he, keep their eyes closed tight, until they are sufficiently startled to open them by the recital of some particularly heartrending circumstance, which pricks the general conscience.

The greatest work performed for Democracy by Charles Dickens was causing the people, whose humanity was lukewarm, to face hard, cruel fact and reality and bestir themselves in the holy work of reform. There was nothing of the leave-it-alone attitude about Dickens. He was not like the man who had heard that there were distressing sights round the corner, but did not have to go round the corner, thank Heaven! His feelings were too deep, his compassion too strong, to make it possible for them to wither in inaction, forgetfulness, or diversion. With him th

relief of the distressed was an imperative duty. The poor were constantly in his thoughts. He was a student of life, London life principally, although he was well acquainted with the great industrial centres of the North. He could not be happy, knowing that there were thousands of his fellow-men in misery; and he did know it, because he made it his business to find out.

Dickens understood that every man and woman has a heart. He realised also that in many cases it is very difficult to reach it. Once reached, however, once awakened to facts and responsibilities, action will follow, and the blot on Christianity and civilisation has a good chance of being wiped out. Feeling so intensely on the matters himself, and seeing that the general apathy was largely caused by ignorance, and ignorance which there was no general inclination to remove, Dickens set out so to stir the minds of men that abuses would be swept away. It was a great goal which he placed before himself, the goal of the sincere, genuine Democrat.

The weapon which Dickens employed in his fight for Democracy was his literary genius. As a weapon it was unique, for it was one on which but few can lay their hands. That it was as effective, and probably more effective, than those wielded by the politician or demagogue, the novelist realised, for when he was invited to stand as candidate for Parliament, he refused. His influence as the most popular and widely-read author of his time was indubitably greater than it would have been as a member of the House of Commons; and no one understood that better than himself. With the publication of "Pickwick Papers" he had won a hearing. He had established his position as a

leading author. Through his books he entered every home, spoke to all manner and conditions of people, who could not be approached in any other way, and reached his objective by the use of humour or pathos. A vast audience hung upon his words, an audience which was not confined to a single country, but embraced two hemispheres. No statesman ever spoke to so huge and attentive a gathering as that addressed by Dickens until wireless came to make listeners innumerable. Reports in the Press lose much by the impossibility of reproducing the speaker's voice and tricks of oratory, while bald facts are not so digestible as those woven into a moving story.

To measure the extent of Dickens' work for Democracy is difficult, for it cannot be described in exact terms. Whereas the political Democrat can point to a list of beneficent Acts which he has been instrumental in placing upon the Statute Book, those who have played their part in so moulding public opinions as to make the passing of such Acts possible, are unable to give so definite an account of their achievements. But the awakening of the public conscience is the first and most arduous step before the passing of enlightened legislation is feasible, and it is in this field that Dickens excelled. While the final removal of some crying injustice or disgraceful wrong may not have been his own direct action, the influence which he exerted by his fearless exposure and the focussing of general attention upon them, was often the initial battle in the war for right. It will now be possible to indicate certain cases in which Dickens was largely responsible for bringing a better state of affairs into existence.

In " Oliver Twist " the novelist turned his search-

light upon abuses in the administration of the Poor Law and the workhouse system. It happens inevitably, when a wrong is exposed, that the one who has had the courage to do so, is bitterly assailed by criticism. Dickens did not escape it in this instance ; and amongst the most severe of his critics was the " Quarterly Review." After charging him with unfairness, it went on to say that :

> The abuses which he ridicules are not only exaggerated, but in nineteen cases out of twenty do not at all exist.

As Charles Dickens, the younger, remarks in his introduction to his father's works, if the abuses existed at all, it was fair and right that the reformer should attack them and the satirist direct his weapons against them. Later reforms of the Poor Law proved that the abuses not only existed, but were not exaggerated ; and ultimately they were swept away by an awakened public opinion. How much of the credit for the welcome change is due to Charles Dickens cannot be computed, but this much is true—that following the publication of " Oliver Twist," many horrible details in parochial mismanagement disappeared.

There are few works of fiction which have had greater influence on the removal of existing abuses than had " Nicholas Nickleby " on the conditions maintaining in the Yorkshire schools. Dickens tells us in the preface to a later edition that there was no obstacle to men, who failed in other walks of life, embarking on the career of schoolmaster. No examinations or qualifications were required of anyone setting up an educational establishment, with the result that men, totally unfitted for so important a profession,

entered it. While this state of affairs was general all over the country, Yorkshire schoolmasters were the greatest offenders. They were "ignorant, sordid, brutal men, to whom few considerate persons would have entrusted the board and lodging of a horse or a dog." Cases existed of lasting disfigurement inflicted upon children by excessively cruel treatment on the part of the masters; and in some cases actions for damages were brought against the perpetrators. The terrible story of neglect, cruelty, and disease was a theme to rouse the spirit of the humane Dickens.

The novelist had heard tales of these disgraceful places when quite a young boy, and the accounts had made a permanent impression upon him. When he had achieved popularity and gained the ear of a large reading public, he resolved to drag the hidden abuse out into the open. It is testimony to his thoroughness that he travelled to Yorkshire to make personal enquiries on the spot and collect his facts. He discovered that the actuality was so serious that the eventual exposure in "Nicholas Nickleby" was an understatement, for he feared that the truth would not be credited. The novel, however, was sufficient to arouse burning indignation and put fear into the hearts of the sinners.

The appearance of "Nicholas Nickleby" found many people identifying Squeers in some schoolmaster or other of their acquaintance, while many of the masters themselves recognised their own persons in the author's creation. One, indeed, even threatened to embark upon an action for libel, until discretion got the upper hand; while another contemplated journeying to London for the express purpose of making a personal attack upon Dickens. The novelist stated

afterwards that Squeers had no original, but was the representative of a class, and added:

> Where imposture, ignorance, and brutal cupidity are the stock in trade of a small body of men, and one is described by these characteristics, all his fellows will recognise something belonging to themselves, and each will have a misgiving that the portrait is his own.

The purpose of Dickens was achieved. Public opinion, thoroughly moved, demanded an enquiry into the condition of affairs, and the hands of the Squeers were manacled. Continued ill-treatment was rendered impossible, and the lives of little children were freed of the torture and horror which had darkened them.

Dickens passed from one subject to another. The moving story of Dr. Marigold, in which the middle-aged man applies himself to teaching little Sophie, the deaf mute, first roused the English people to their sense of duty towards this unfortunate class. A somewhat similar circumstance occurs in the "Cricket on the Hearth," in the devotion of Caleb Plummer, the toymaker, to his blind daughter, Bertha. The public began to take an interest in these matters, and discussions followed as to the best method of helping those who were so afflicted. And still Dickens led them from the consideration of one cause of misery to a new revelation, and roused the desire for action to sweep these terrible things from human life. In "Barnaby Rudge" is an eloquent plea for the mentally deficient; and people commenced to survey the problem in a new light, with the result that reforms were subsequently introduced which can be traced to

the impression created by the novel. Never had the poor and unfortunate so eloquent a champion as this genius, who swayed the minds of men, tore the scales from their eyes, and forced them to a realisation of their duty.

Against legal absurdities Dickens mostly preferred to use the weapon of ridicule. His knowledge of the by-ways of legal life was as extensive as Sam Weller's knowledge of London. He was acquainted with lawyers of all types, the sharp practitioners of the Dodson and Fogg school, the human solicitor like Perker, and the secretive family adviser of the stamp of Mr. Tulkinghorn. He was familiar with the inside of the Courts and the weird and wonderful processes of the Law. He appreciated the aggravating delays and inconveniences borne by a long-suffering public. Jarndyce and Jarndyce was no great exaggeration, and " Bleak House " aroused the anger of the lawyers, particularly Lord Denman, formerly Chief Justice of the Queen's Bench, who launched an attack on the novel in the " Standard." But Dickens had the satisfaction of seeing many of the abuses, at which he directed his artillery, removed in his own lifetime, and knew that he had done his part in bringing about much-needed reform. In a preface to a later edition of " Pickwick " he wrote :

> Legal reforms have pared the claws of Messrs. Dodson and Fogg ; a spirit of self-respect, mutual forbearance, education, and co-operation for such good ends, has diffused itself among their clerks ; places far apart are brought together to the present convenience and advantage of the Public ; and to the certain extinction, in time, of a host of petty

jealousies, blindness, and prejudices, by which the Public alone have always been the sufferers; the laws relating to imprisonment for debt are altered; and the Fleet Prison is pulled down.

In all these Dickens had helped. Who can doubt that the experiences of Mr. Pickwick in the Fleet, or the Dorrit family in the Marshalsea, focussed attention on the whole question of the treatment of insolvency? Who would deny that the dealings of Dodson and Fogg inspired greater protection for the public, or at least warned them of pitfalls ahead? Who would say that the interminable case of Jarndyce and Jarndyce was not without its influence on the proceedings of the Court of Chancery? No reforms are possible until people are stirred out of their ignorance and apathy, and Dickens stirred them with an eloquence and pleading that were irresistible.

It would be possible to point to numerous instances where Dickens referred to the squalid housing conditions in which the poorest lived. There is hardly a work of his in which the problem of the slums is not referred to. Overcrowding and dirt were evils which pained his sensitive soul, for he knew how prolific they were in breeding disease and immorality. Again and again Dickens harped upon this subject, and no one has played a greater part in disturbing the sleeping conscience of the people. He was criticised for laying the story of Oliver Twist among the dregs of humanity on the ground that the subject was an unpleasant one and best avoided; but it was Dickens' object to force people to discard their indifference and face the facts, for only so was there any hope that conditions would be improved. While he still lived, he saw many of

the filthy quarters of the city, mean, drab streets in which he had caused his own characters to move, pulled down and replaced by broad, handsome thoroughfares. He was grateful for this beginning, for he was not among those who excuse themselves from doing anything because the magnitude of the problem overwhelms them and causes them to regard any attempt at reform as hopeless. Dickens believed that no evil condition could resist a concerted and determined effort on the part of a whole people. He did not expect evils to vanish instantaneously under the wave of a magic wand. He knew the fight against overcrowding, disease, and sin would be long and bitter, but he urged his readers to the battle in the name of all that was best in mankind. He rejected with contempt the argument that the health and morality of the people were expensive. He believed that the objects were worth the outpouring of treasure, and in this he showed the sterling character of his democratic faith. Much has been done since the novelist's day, and much is undoubtedly the fruit of his own crusade, but these evils continue to exist, even if their form is less aggravated, and the slums, sickness, and wickedness still bar the path to happiness for thousands of God's children.

Dickens died only a few years before Arnold Toynbee discovered the region in which Mr. Stiggins first appeared—Brick Lane, running from Whitechapel to Bethnal Green—and by his "Lectures on the Industrial Revolution" woke intellectual England to the knowledge of what industrialization had brought about. Dickens had the same knowledge forty years earlier, when he tried to interest the intellectuals on the matter, whose minds were busy with other things.

In one of his speeches he said :

> Neither education nor religion can do anything useful, until the way has been paved for their ministration by cleanliness and decency.

In the preface to " Martin Chuzzlewit " he wrote :

> In all my writings I hope I have taken every possible opportunity of showing the want of sanitary improvements in the neglected dwellings of the poor.

As a convinced Democrat and a keen student of social conditions, he was not content with concentrating attention on an ill, but applied himself to practical remedy. He did not preach to others and do nothing himself. That would have laid him open to a charge of hypocrisy. He was found supporting actively any movement having for its object the improvement of the lot of the people. Not only was he liberal with his donations, but with his personal help as well. An example is the part which he played in the saving of the Great Ormond Hospital for Children, founded a few years before, from financial disaster. He took the chair at a meeting on its behalf, and made one of the best speeches in his life, which brought in over £3,000 at once. Shortly afterwards he gave a reading of the " Christmas Carol " for the same cause, and with no less effect. He had been warned against the strain of such performances, but " the honour of the calling by which I have always stood conscientiously " bade him give freely of his talent at whatever cost.

With no enemy did Dickens battle with greater ferocity than with the demon of ignorance. Like the true Democrat, he saw that the solution of most of our social problems was to be found through the

channel of education. The novelist had this question so near his heart, he had become so great a student of educational methods, and associated himself with the spreading of knowledge so closely in his writings and in his private life, that this part of his work for Democracy requires consideration in a separate chapter.

It would be impossible to consider all the phases of life on which the influence of Dickens descended for good, for they are too numerous and various. It would not be feasible to discuss separately all the abuses, in the removal of which he took a leading rôle, for he touched upon every side of existence where wrong and injustice were to be found. A complete account of his work for Democracy would fill many volumes, but the instances which have been cited show how genuine and true were his objects and how far-reaching his influence. His achievements stand high in history, whether it was a case of exposing a state of affairs which was alterable and a disgrace to a civilised community, whether it was a matter of arousing sympathy in the general public for hardships which could be alleviated or removed, or whether it was a question of eliminating what was foolish and ridiculous in the public institutions of the nation. Many reformers, who have thundered out their programmes from their places in the House of Commons or their platforms at the street corners, must envy his record, and wish that they had accomplished with their noisy rhetoric but half of what he won by the silent power of his pen.

Dickens and Education

The Democrat, who boldly faces the ills which infest the world, would sink in discouragement did he not pin his faith to a remedy, which he believes is capable of banishing them and shutting the door on their return. There would be little lasting good in Democracy if, after removing the causes of oppression, those who were lately oppressed were not granted the freedom and chance to rise and make the best of the gifts with which Nature has endowed them. Such an end can only be attained through the channels of education and the widest opportunities for learning.

No one knew better than Charles Dickens for how much evil, how much crime and immorality, ignorance was responsible. Like all great Democrats, he espoused the cause of universal education. He believed in it. He saw that therein lay the only hope for bettering the conditions of suffering humanity. He became a student of educational methods and went deeply into the subject. He was not concerned only with the fact that many had no education at all—in 1851 30.7 per cent. of males and 45.2 per cent. of females were illiterate—but he saw the great need for reform in those establishments which did exist, not only in the curriculum, but in the characters of the teachers themselves. It is testimony of Dickens' great interest in this vast subject that schools and schoolmasters and schoolmistresses figure prominently in his novels. We have Salem House, Nuns' House, Dotheboys'

Hall, Minerva House, Westgate House, Dr. Blimber's establishment, to mention a few; while the Blimber family, Creakle, M'Choakumchild, Squeers, Bradley Headstone, the Misses Crumpton, and many others are important people in the stories.

Education for the masses was attracting considerable attention amongst advanced thinkers in the early part of the Victorian era—the era, that is, when Dickens was at the height of his power and popularity as a novelist. Institutions of learning began to spring up all over the kingdom, which catered for a class of citizen hitherto unprovided for. They did not make their appearance without opposition. There was a conservative school of opinion, not even in these days quite silenced, which looked askance at admitting the uneducated classes into the palace of knowledge. They regarded it as dangerous; and prophecies of restlessness, discontent, and ultimate disturbance were general. The Democrats paid no heed to these fears, and began to press their point that human beings were entitled to all the good that could be bestowed on them, and had a just right to be freed from the manacling chains of ignorance.

Dickens associated himself wholly with those views, which were then considered advanced. To the well-known argument that a little knowledge was a dangerous thing he retorted:

> Why, a little hanging was considered a dangerous thing according to these same authorities, with this difference, that because a little hanging was dangerous, we had a great deal of it, and because a little learning was dangerous, we were to have none at all.

Again, speaking at Manchester in October, 1843, he said:

> Let a man once have chased the dragon ignorance from his hearth, and self-respect and hope are left to him.

Dickens believed in education because he believed in the people on whom he wished its blessings to be conferred. He had seen many cases where men had benefited by the opportunity to learn, and never tired of citing them in his speeches. He told of a chainmaker whose thirst for knowledge was such that he walked regularly six miles to his night school; he related the case of a piecer of mule-frames, who could not read at eighteen, yet at twenty was a teacher in the school where he had been taught; he spoke of a man who began hand-loom weaving "when he was a mere baby," and became president of a local literary institution; he mentioned factory hands who took prizes in chemistry. Such examples justified the novelist's faith in the people whose cause he championed; and while he was not optimistic enough to imagine that everyone who was given his educational chance would make the best use of it, he did believe that the majority would become sufficiently enlightened to be able to help themselves and tackle their own difficulties. The following is an extract from one of his speeches:

> The more a man learns, the better, gentler, and kinder man he must become. When he knows how much great minds have suffered for the truth in every age and time, and to what dismal persecutions opinions have been exposed, he will become

more tolerant of other men's belief in all matters, and will incline more leniently to their sentiments when they chance to differ from his own. Understanding that the relations between himself and his employer involve a mutual duty and responsibility, he will discharge his part of the implied contract cheerfully, satisfactorily, and honourably.

This last prophecy of Dickens does not appear, unhappily, to have been realised in our modern Democracy. The fact does not necessarily imply that the novelist was wrong in his forecast, but rather suggests that our education is not sufficiently advanced, as yet, to have reached the stage when such a satisfactory state of affairs can exist. Dickens was blessed with long vision and did not expect that the great aims of education would be attained in a generation or even a succession of generations. " I look forward," he said, " to the time when every man shall inaugurate his own work and do it." That is peering very far into the future, a future that education will reach eventually, but one which is clouded at the moment by a mist of impossible creeds, under which a man's work would be determined, directed, and controlled by a Socialistic State.

Dickens was a firm believer in the healing effect of education upon crime. He had enormous faith in the power of knowledge to make a track through the jungle of ignorance, along which social reform could travel. Speaking on this point at Birmingham in February, 1844, he said :

I hold that it is impossible for any fabric of society to go on day after day, and year after year . . . punishing men for not engaging in the pursuit of

virtue and for the practice of crime without showing what virtue is and where it best can be found in justice, religion, and truth.

The novelist recognised the futility of punishing men for ignorance. In his day death was the penalty for many offences, and transportation was still practised. He attacked the harshness and inhumanity of the criminal code and pleaded that knowledge, and not stripes, was the most effective method of suppressing crime. Particularly did he stress this point in the case of juvenile offenders, whose young lives were often blasted at an early age by degrading and excessive punishment. In "Household Words" occurs the following stirring passage referring to two starving children, who stole a loaf :

> They were sentenced to be whipped in the House of Correction. To be whipped! Can the State devise no better sentence for its little children? Will it never sentence them to be taught?

The humane Dickens hated the rod. He knew that the practice of caning was disgracefully abused. He knew that beatings were often given where moral persuasion would have been more effective, and that corporal punishment came more easily to the schoolmaster than explanation and instruction. Does he not make us hate Squeers and Creakle for this very fault? Do we not recoil at their brutality and pity their poor, innocent victims?

Dickens had very definite ideas of what education should consist. "I concur," he said, in a speech at Birmingham, "in the great and omnipotent principles of comprehensive education everywhere and under

every circumstance." But he would have teaching such as would kindle the imagination. He would not banish fairy tales and substitute "imperial gallons of fact." He deals with this point in a passage of delightful satire in "Hard Times," when he puts these words into the mouth of Mr. Gradgrind, the man "with a rule and a pair of scales, and the multiplication table always in his pocket, sir, ready to weigh and measure any parcel of human nature, and tell you exactly what it comes to:"

> "Now, what I want is, Facts. Teach these boys and girls nothing but Facts. Facts alone are wanted in life. Plant nothing else, and root out everything else. You can only form the minds of reasoning animals on Facts: nothing else will ever be of any service to them. This is the principle on which I bring up my own children, and this is the principle on which I bring up these children. Stick to Facts, sir."

This is a wonderful commentary, in Dickens' own rich humour, on that misguided education which succeeds in turning pupils out to pattern, in effectively killing all originality and individuality, and leading the young mind into a hopeless groove. Dickens was too keen a student of education not to see the folly of such a course. He realised, and was in advance of his time, and perhaps of our time also, in realising, that true education should develop the latent talents in the child and enable hidden genius to show itself. He would not have young scholars fashioned in a mould, but allowed to blossom like flowers with their individual shapes and colour and beauty.

Dickens saw that the ideal of developing children

individually was impossible while the teachers themselves were turned out to a well-defined pattern. Personality and individuality in the schoolmaster awaken a quick response in the pupils; but too close an adherence to formulæ, too regular a diet of dry, bald fact, too much neglect of the imagination, destroy initiative and produce monotonous uniformity. The novelist attacks this point in the person of Mr. M'Choakumchild:

> He and some one hundred-and-forty other schoolmasters had been lately turned at the same time, in the same factory, on the same principles, like so many pianoforte legs. He had been put through an immense variety of paces, and had answered volumes of head-breaking questions. . . . He had worked his stony way into Her Majesty's most Honourable Privy Council's Schedule B, and had taken the bloom off the higher branches of mathematics and physical science, French, German, Latin, and Greek. . . . Ah! rather overdone, M'Choakumchild. If he had only learnt a little less, how infinitely better he might have taught much more!

Dickens was never weary of criticising the methods by which educational knowledge was conveyed to the child. He pleaded that lessons should be made interesting. He showed that what was good for one child was not necessarily good for another. He deplored the system of stuffing a little head with more than it could contain and with much that was useless. He regarded it as just as great an evil as putting nothing into the little head at all. His views on foolish cramming find expression—as all his views found expression

somewhere—in the description of Dr. Blimber's establishment in " Dombey and Son " :

> Whenever a young gentleman was taken in hand by Dr. Blimber, he might consider himself sure of a pretty tight squeeze. The doctor only undertook the charge of ten young gentlemen, but he had, always ready, a supply of learning for a hundred, on the lowest estimate ; and it was at once the business and delight of his life to gorge the unhappy ten with it.
>
> In fact, Dr. Blimber's establishment was a great hot-house, in which there was a forcing apparatus incessantly at work. All the boys blew off before their time. Mental green-peas were produced at Christmas, and intellectual asparagus all the year round. . . .
>
> Nature was of no consequence at all. No matter what a young gentleman was intended to bear, Dr. Blimber made him bear to pattern, somehow or other.

Many more extracts from the novels could be given dealing with this educational theme, but enough has been quoted to show that Dickens was an enlightened educationalist. Some of the shortcomings of school teaching which he exposed are present with us to-day, although since his time a long line of Education Acts have been passed, the Board of Education has come into being, and compulsory elementary education is a fact. As education is the foremost plank in the democratic platform, so Dickens was in the foremost rank of the apostles of education, and this fact alone would entitle him to a place among the great exponents of Democracy.

With the faith which he had in education, it is not surprising to find Dickens associating himself in person with all undertakings having the dissemination of knowledge for their object. He was an early and frequent visitor to the first kindergarten opened in London. He interested himself deeply in the founding of the Ragged Schools Union, now covered by the more desirable name of the Shaftesbury Society. Those who know the work of the Schools themselves, or the abundant humanity of the late Sir John Kirk, will not need to have the achievement of the Union and its ideals praised. The name of Dickens is associated with those of Lord Shaftesbury and the Baroness Burdett-Coutts in the history of London children. He wrote in 1843 :

> I sent Miss Coutts (as she was then) a sledge-hammer account of the Ragged Schools, and as I saw her name for two hundred pounds in the Clergy Subscription list, took pains to show her that religious mysteries and difficult creeds wouldn't do for such pupils. I told her, too, that it was of immense importance that they should be *washed*.

To further an object, which he had so much at heart, Dickens was ready to go to any trouble. He offered to describe the Schools in the " Edinburgh Review," and the offer was refused, for he was in advance of the intellectuals. He gave donations, but his help cannot be measured in terms of money. In 1846 he was corresponding with Lord John Russell about the Schools, and helping Miss Coutts " a good deal " in regard to this and all her charitable projects. In 1851, when he proposed the health of the then Lord Ashley, afterwards the " good " Lord Shaftesbury,

he dwelt in glowing terms on his great work in connection with the Union. Speaking of a child taken into the Schools " out of the noisome places in which his life was passed," he said :

> Give him a glimpse of heaven through a little of its light and air. . . . Lighten the heavy atmosphere in which their spirits flag, and which makes them the callous things they are.

He ended by eulogising the courage of Lord Shaftesbury in facing " on all occasions the cant which is the worst and commonest of all, the cant about philanthropy." One sees the image of Chadband, of Mrs. Pardiggle, and even of Mrs. Jellyby, in his mind's eye.

It was not in London only that Dickens attended in person to further the aims of educational institutions. He addressed gatherings in Edinburgh, Liverpool, Manchester, Birmingham, and other cities, and was always ready and anxious to give them his support and blessing. On many occasions he would take the chair at a soirée, and sometimes performed the opening ceremony. Most of these institutions placed before working men the opportunity of completing their education after their school-days were over. Secondary education in the novelist's lifetime was in a bad way. There was little of it for the masses, and even to-day it has not yet been placed on a satisfactory footing. Dickens was always enthusiastic about every widening of the portals of knowledge, and never lost an opportunity of expressing his opinions. Speaking at a soirée of the members of the Manchester Athenæum in October, 1843, he said :

> It is grand to know that while the factories re-echo with the clanking of stupendous engines

and the whirl and rattle of machines, the immortal mechanism of God's own hand, the mind, is not forgotten in the din and uproar, but is lodged and tended in a palace of its own.

In Dickens' wide view of the educational field he did not omit to embrace amusement and recreation, knowing that it is a most important branch of the subject. He saw that amusement could be instructive without losing anything in the way of entertainment, and he would have people indulge in diversion that was healthy. He knew only too well the fascination of the public house and the exciting influence of alcohol. We have the authority of his biographer, John Forster, for the statement that he felt strongly on the question of temperance, even to the extent of approving its legislative enforcement. That he abhorred drunkenness the remorse of David Copperfield proves, but he did not condemn so much as sympathise with the [illegible], squalor, and monotony that drove men [illegible] to seek forgetfulness in drink. He was in favour of the provision of counter-attractions, sane and [illegible], so that men should see life other than through "the dirty panes of glass in a bar door." "People mutht be amuthed, Thquire," says Sleary, the proprietor of a circus, in "Hard Times." He introduces the amusements of the people in many of his novels, examples of which are Mrs. Jarley's wax-works, Kit's visit to Astley's, or the passages on entertainment in "Sketches by Boz." His own views on the provision of attractions and the foolish official-dom which kept them closed at the very time when they would be most appreciated, are expressed in the following extract :

> Sunday evening in London, gloomy, close, and stale . . . everything was bolted and barred that could by any possibility furnish relief to an overworked people. No picture, no unfamiliar animals, no rare plants or flowers, no artificial or natural wonders of the ancient world.

Dickens appreciated to the full the help to education that sane amusements could be. He never defined education in a narrow sense. It did not consist for him in inoculating the child with doses of mathematics, history, and geography, administered in the most unpalatable form. He knew that the true aim of education was to make people think for themselves, to teach them to observe and widen their outlook, and to give them self-reliance and self-respect. He understood that true education was not confined to the schoolroom, but extended to the whole of life, and was not limited to the hours of school attendance, but overflowed into the times of recreation. It was this advanced point of view that made him plead for plenty of amusement, available and accessible at all times, so that men and women could improve themselves in the easiest and most pleasant way possible.

Dickens attacked with vigour that school of thought which imagined that education was the privilege of a class. He often heard the question asked: "What did the working-class want with education?" He was familiar with the argument that knowledge in the lower orders of society was a bad thing, tending to promote dissatisfaction, and the further plea that it was unnecessary to teach people to think for themselves when there were their betters to think for them.

He satirises this unenlightened point of view in " Bleak House " :

> The present representative of the Dedlocks is an excellent master. He supposes all his dependents to be utterly bereft of individual characters, intentions, or opinions, and is persuaded that he was born to supersede the necessity of their having any. If he were to make a discovery to the contrary, he would be simply stunned—would never recover himself, most likely, except to gasp and die.

The novelist knew that convictions of this sort had never succeeded in any degree in alleviating the distresses of the poor. They must be taught how to help themselves, for in that lay the only hope of an improvement in their lot. A child was not educated when he could repeat correctly the dates of the English kings and enumerate the watersheds of Europe. He was only educated when he was imbued with a sense of personal responsibility, when he learned to act on his own initiative, and had been shown how best to develop the talents with which he was endowed. The good of education was not seen in the ability to pour forth a stream of superficial knowledge, but rather in a rise in the standard of morality, in an increase in domestic virtue, in religious habits, and in a greater tendency towards thrift and temperance.

Dickens did not limit himself to passionate denunciation, of which he was so great a master. An attempt has been made to show in these pages how he went into details and gave practical help. A study of the many addresses which he delivered to working-men's institutes and similar bodies shows that he was always thoroughly conversant with the facts. If further

proof is needed, it is supplied by his original autograph manuscript on " The Condition of the Working Classes," which follows this chapter. This manuscript, which is full of interest, and an eloquent example of his democratic views, appears to be a draft report, or a preface to a report, on a competition held at some institute or other, at which he must have been asked to judge.

CHARLES DICKENS
ON
"THE CONDITION OF THE WORKING CLASSES"

ORIGINAL AUTOGRAPH MANUSCRIPT

Discussing their Economic and Moral Advancement, the Relationship between Income and Expenditure, and the Need of Thrift for Ensuring Future Comfort.

"THE CONDITIONS OF THE WORKING CLASSES"

The subject of the essay was proposed, and the questions were framed (with the exceptions of questions 4, 5, 6, 7, and 8) so that they should be almost identical with some of the questions previously proposed to the competitors, and might thus, while eliciting their habits of observation and reflection, afford some test of the effect of the previous examination on those important qualities.

It is interesting to observe that the real expenditures set forth in the first Summary have been carefully considered, and that many charges not before taken into account—such as for tools, wear and tear of furniture, and the purchase of beer—are now duly remembered in the supposititious expenditures. It will likewise be seen that the Competitors have not treated the first question, merely as a repetition of the question relating to Wages, in the former Summary, but that they have framed their answers with an especial reference to the distinction between a fixed

annual salary and weekly wages. This is quite alright; for, though the amount of the two classes of Income given in the real expenditure does not materially vary, taking the whole year through, still, when the Income is certain and not liable to the fluctuations of wages strictly so called, many arrangements for comfort and economy are easily practicable, which, in a case of weekly wages, are far more difficult.

Many persons will probably be surprised by finding the total annual amount of the weekly wages of a labourer or Mechanic, larger than they had expected. It would seem that the condition of the labouring classes, generally speaking, might be greatly improved by a more sustained forethought, and a more systematic economy, during the Summer time and the seasons favourable to saving. It is certain that it would be immensely bettered by their being more prudent and self-denying before Marriage. As a rule, a single woman can, of course, earn more (having fewer domestic duties to engage her time and attention) than a married woman. But a man usually receives the same wages whether he be married or single; and not only his own happiness but the happiness of many others would be much advanced by his reflecting of that time of his life that an income which is quite sufficient, or something more than sufficient, for the expenses of one person, can be with difficulty eked out to cover the charges of a family; and by his considering that a few years of saving and forethought at that period of his career, will lay the lasting foundations of a comfortable Home. Nor is it requiring too much of him to take these things to heart, because it is not to be doubted that he may be so enabled to establish himself in life, with even less exertion, postponement,

and anxiety than often has to be endured by his employer before he can attain the ardently desired end. It is of unspeakable importance to their own happiness, self-respect, and rational enjoyment of life, that the youth of both sexes among the working people should accustom themselves to thus much of preparation and honourable forethought, before they take upon themselves the responsible duties of heads of families, and surely this would not be incompatible with that help to morality, domestic virtue, and religious habits, which many whose opinion is entitled to all respect hold to be furnished by early marriages, notwithstanding the privations and evils that often follow in their train.

It appears so essential to bring these considerations prominently under the notice of Teachers, that a calculation has been made (and will be found in the Appendix), distinctly shewing how much a workman receiving —— per week at —— years of age could, by properly investing a steady saving from it, accumulate in five years. As it seldom happens that any two men are situated precisely alike, and as it constantly happens that one has few claims upon him while another has many, and those of the strongest kind—as when he has an aged father or mother to assist—it is felt that no rule can be absolute, and it is readily conceded that there may be many cases in which such a laying-by would be impossible. On this point, as on every other comprehended within these pages, it is to be borne in mind above all things that the object is to help the workman and his wife to do for themselves what they *can* do ; and not harshly and unreasonably to expect them to do anything that is beyond their power.

The Progressive Mind

The true Democrat views change neither with dislike nor alarm. He is always advocating progress and is healthily discontented with things as they are. He knows that stagnation means retrogression; and it is his business to keep the wheels of reform turning while a single case of injustice or hardship remains. In his steady, forward advance he discards the restraining cords of old-established forms and institutions, when these have outlived their usefulness. He is not fettered with prejudices, nor troubled by reverence for what is patently out-of-date. He does not destroy what is still valuable, nor does he make alterations for the mere sake of doing something. He may experiment when seeking a remedy for some grave, existing evil, but even if his first experiment fails, he is not deterred from trying others, knowing that no course can be worse than to allow a sore in the body politic to fester till it breaks forth in eruption. Although his experiments may not cure, they often alleviate, while the experience gained in making them gives him the knowledge to tackle the problem another time with greater prospect of success. Apathy, indifference, lassitude, and the policy of *laissez-faire* cannot dwell in the Democrat. Activity, energy, enthusiasm, and courage must possess him. He must not discard common sense. Recourse to wild expedient will cause ills worse than he seeks to cure.

Judgment, sound judgment, must guide him, based upon experience and observation.

These requirements of the Democrat were possessed in full measure by Charles Dickens. Of his experience and observation enough has been said in previous pages to warrant a wholesome respect for his judgment. He had the progressive mind and welcomed change and innovation. He was free of foolish bias and prejudice; and of his courage in attacking all that was harmful, be it ever so time-honoured and deeply rooted in the national life, there can be no two opinions.

On out-of-date loyalty to old-time forms and ceremonies he expressed himself in no uncertain voice. In a forcible speech, delivered at a great political meeting at Drury Lane in June, 1855, he said:

> Obstinate adherence to rubbish, which the time has long outlived, is certain to have in the soul of it more or less that is pernicious and destructive, and will some day set fire to something or other, which, if given boldly to the winds would have been harmless, but which obstinately retained is ruinous.

In the 'forties, the hungry 'forties, only a few men like Dickens had escaped from the shams of the Georgian era, from the monstrous clinging to forms as necessary forms, to outworn catch-words as holy writ, to things always done as things always to be done. Touch this or that abuse and "down comes the Constitution." Dickens, proud though he was of the British Constitution and its high traditions, would probably, in certain cases, have said, "So much the better for the Constitution." He did say it, virtually,

in an attack on the Government in 1855, when he pleaded :

> " for a great peaceful constitutional change," because " the machinery of Government and the legislature was going round and round, and the people fallen from it and standing aloof."

He quoted, in the same speech, what is perhaps the sublimest of all bureaucratic follies. He said that the old wooden Exchequer tally sticks, in spite of enquiries about their usefulness in the reign of George III, were not abolished until 1826. Even then they were not destroyed, or sold, or given away as fuel. They were kept until 1836, when :

> the order went forth that they were to be privately and confidentially burnt. It came to pass that they were burnt in a stove in the House of Lords. The stove, overgorged with these preposterous sticks, set fire to the panelling ; the panelling set fire to the House of Lords ; the House of Lords set fire to the House of Commons ; the two houses were reduced to ashes.

This true story causes one to wonder whether the charge of exaggeration sometimes brought against Dickens for his more grandiose characters and scenes, may not itself be exaggerated. His protest, at any rate, is that of a robust man of the people with no respect for " found-out nonsense."

The extreme liberalism of his opinions caused him to take a broad view of everything, even the most cherished institutions of the Nation. While he had the Englishman's respect for the monarchy, he did not slavishly concur in the verdict of history concerning

all those who had occupied the throne. He hated the adulation poured on the overrated, avaricious James I, whom he spoke of as " His Sowship." He abhorred the profligacy of Charles II, and would not agree that Charles I was a martyr, although he could see good in Laud. He respected the strength and sincerity of Cromwell. Yet he was living in an age when there grew up something like the monarch-worship which he attacked. But he was not afraid. He was not a Conservative of lost ideals, but an advanced Democrat.

Dickens did not withhold his criticism from the House of Commons, and would accept nothing as perfect and admitting of no improvement. How little tradition and reputation affected him is evidenced in the following reply to the request of a London constituency that he would become their candidate :

> I declare that as to all matters on the face of the earth, it appears to me that the House of Commons, and Parliament altogether, is become just the dreariest failure and nuisance that ever bothered this much bothered world.

He again criticised the House of Commons, and attacked its conservatism and class prejudice, in the course of his speech at the Drury Lane gathering of 1855 :

> I will not ask how it happens that bills which cramp and worry the people and restrict their scanty enjoyments, are so easily passed, and how it happens that measures for their real interest are so difficult to be got through Parliament. . . . I will merely put to the experience of everybody here whether the House of Commons is not occasionally

a little hard of hearing, a little dim of sight, a little slow of understanding, and whether, in short, it is not in a sufficiently invalided state to require close watching, and the occasional application of sharp stimulants, and whether it is not capable of considerable improvement.

Dickens was genuinely distressed at the ineffectiveness of the House of Commons as a medium for democratic reform. "Our political aristocracy and our tuft-hunting are the death of England," he wrote in a gloomy letter to Forster in 1855. "In all this business I don't see a gleam of hope." He criticised, because he wished to rouse the people to demand improvement and alteration. He touched upon the weak spots in the following words, which have a decided ring of pessimism:

With an enormous black cloud of poverty in every town which is spreading and deepening every hour, and not one man of two thousand knowing anything about, or even believing in, its existence; with a non-working aristocracy, and a silent Parliament, and everybody for himself and nobody for the rest—this is the prospect, and I think it a very deplorable one. . . .

This was no exaggeration, and Dickens felt its truth keenly. He was so sincere a Democrat that he deplored the failure of the assembly through which alone reforms for improving the lot of the masses could come. Here again he did not speak without a knowledge of the facts. He had a closer acquaintance with the House of Commons than most people, gained when he filled the post of parliamentary reporter for the "Sun" and the "Morning Chronicle." Even in those days

he was not overawed by the majesty of Parliament from seeing that it was far from perfect. He was glad when his literary successes enabled him to escape from the dreary debate, and he writes in "David Copperfield":

> One joyful night, therefore, I noted down the music of the parliamentary bagpipes for the last time, and I have never heard it since.

During his career as reporter Dickens used his powers of observation to the full, and saw the shortcomings of the party system and the little foibles of the ordinary M.P. He received more than one invitation to stand for Parliament, but he declined in each case, not only because he realised that his power for good was greater in the literary field, but also because he did not wish to sink his individuality in party, nor lose his independence. In a letter to Mr. Lovejoy, after he had refused Reading's invitation to him to become their candidate, he said:

> I cannot satisfy myself that to enter Parliament under such circumstances would enable me to pursue the rôle of honourable independence without which I could neither preserve my own self-respect, nor that of my constituents.

Dickens, Democrat though he was, would probably have hesitated definitely to adopt a political label, preferring to have no restrictions, but to remain free to attack wrong and injustice whenever and wherever he found them.

The weaknesses of Members of Parliament he treats in a vein of delightful satire in the person of Mr. Gregsbury in "Nicholas Nickleby." There are the

glorious pages in which the deputation waits on their Member with a request for his resignation, and Mr. Gregsbury's flat refusal to do any such thing. There follows the amusing interview with Nicholas Nickleby, who is applying for the position of this important man's private secretary, with the recital of the arduous duties which he must undertake for the munificent salary of fifteen shillings a week. Mr. Gregsbury expects to be crammed by his secretary, who should be master of the foreign policy of the world. Nickleby is told that he must watch the papers for mysterious disappearances and suicides so that his employer may draw public attention to himself by asking questions of the Home Secretary. Then he must send a copy of the question and as much as Mr. Gregsbury can remember of the answer to the local press, with complimentary remarks on the Member's independence and good sense. He must also get up a few little arguments on some complicated political matter, "which it's only necessary to talk fluently about, because nobody understands it." He must compose a "few little flourishing speeches of a patriotic cast," and finally he must wait in the lobby every night in case Mr. Gregsbury forgets anything or wants fresh cramming; and must occasionally sit in the front row of the gallery and say to people, "That's Mr. Gregsbury, the celebrated Mr. Gregsbury," with any other eulogium that might occur to him.

A good deal of truth lay beneath this humorous description of a Member of Parliament, and Dickens, in his longing for improvement, paraded it in the light of day. A modern Liberal might be inclined to say that a reformer who had lost faith in the House of Commons and its members was something more than

a mere Democrat. But the novelist had not lost faith in the idea, but in the manner in which that idea was carried out in practice. Dickens was advanced, but not revolutionary in the sense in which we use the term in these days. He was for liberty and freedom, and against oppression and tyranny. He would have opposed the tyranny of the Red Flag with all his characteristic energy, just as he opposed the various forms of tyranny which he knew. He was not antagonistic to class, and believed that all grades of society had rights which should be respected. The invasion of one class on the rights of another was the evil which he fought ; and as it was the working class who suffered most in his day, they were most often in his thoughts.

One thing that Dickens ridiculed was the pursuit of titles. Both he and Thackeray censured their age for tuft-hunting. Dickens had no respect for a lord as a lord, but he could respect him as a man. A question arose towards the end of the novelist's life whether the conferring of life peerages might not be a suitable reward for eminence in literature. Commenting on the suggestion, the " Times," in 1869, gave what was probably an accurate summary of Dickens' own views on the matter :

> We are inclined to doubt if Mr. Dickens himself would gain anything by a Life Peerage. Mr. Dickens is pre-eminently a writer of the people and for the people. To our thinking, he is far better suited for the part of the " Great Commoner " of English fiction than for even a Life Peerage. To turn Charles Dickens into Lord Dickens would be much the same mistake in literature that it was in politics to turn William Pitt into Lord Chatham.

Lord Dickens sounds incongruous to-day. He has become entrenched in literary history as Dickens, simply, and is remembered as the humane Democrat with whom a high-sounding aristocratic title cannot be reconciled. He would probably have rejected the honour had it been proffered, but he would have accepted the Order of Merit, if it had then been in existence, for he welcomed recognition of his achievements.

Red tape and officialdom did not escape the great novelist's shaft of satire. He realised what a millstone around the neck of Democracy was bureaucratic inefficiency and mismanagement. Sometimes official incompetency roused him to anger, a fact that may be gathered from a letter addressed to Captain Morgan during the Crimean War, in which he wrote :

> You see what we have been doing to our valiant soldiers. You see what miserable humbugs we are. And because we have got involved in meshes of aristocratic red tape to our unspeakable confusion, loss, and sorrow, the gentlemen who have been so kind as to ruin us, are going to give us a day of humiliation and fasting, the day after to-morrow.

More often Dickens used the weapon of humour to attack the idiosyncrasies of officialdom (from which we continue to suffer), and created the Circumlocution Office and the race of Barnacles. "How Not To Do It" is very much in evidence still, and the following method of conducting government business has truth lurking beneath its exaggeration. Arthur Clennam, wishing to investigate Mr. Dorrit's affairs with a view to releasing him from the Marshalsea Prison, enquires of Ferdinand Barnacle of the Circumlocution Office

how he can obtain information as to the state of the case. The bureaucrat answers :

> " You'll find out what Department the contract was in, and then you'll find out all about it there."
>
> " I beg your pardon. How shall I find out ? "
>
> " Why, you'll—you'll ask till they tell you. Then you'll memorialise that Department (according to regular forms which you'll find out) for leave to memorialise this Department. If you get it (which you may, after a time), that memorial must be entered in that Department, sent to be registered in this Department, sent back to be signed by that Department, sent back to be counter-signed by this Department, and then it will begin to be regularly before that Department. You'll find out when the business passes through each of these stages, by asking at both Departments, till they tell you."

In the dedication of " Little Dorrit " to Clarkson Stanfield, R.A., Dickens said: " If I might offer any apology for so exaggerated a fiction as the Barnacles and Circumlocution Office, I would seek it in the common experience of an Englishman." Englishmen are still suffering from this experience to-day, and reform in the manner in which government business is transacted must surely be desired by every Democrat as ardently as it was desired by Dickens.

The publication of " Little Dorrit " brought attacks on its author, as he no doubt expected that it would. There was too much that was true in the account of the Circumlocution Office. One of the most violent came from the " Edinburgh Review," of which Mr. Henry Reeve, who also held the post of Registrar of the Privy Council, was then the editor. The " Review,"

while severely criticising other things in the novel, stoutly defended the great official departments and denied that "there was any trace of a Circumlocution Office to be detected among them all." The article desired to know: "What does Mr. Dickens think of the whole organisation of the Post Office and the system of cheap postage? . . . to take a single and well-known example, how does he account for the career of Mr. Rowland Hill?" The mention of Rowland Hill delivered the "Review" Editor into Dickens' hands. He wrote a crushing reply to the attack on him in "Household Words," 1st August 1857, in which he said:

> Mr. Rowland Hill! ! Why, if Mr. Rowland Hill were not, in toughness, a man in a hundred thousand; if he had not had in the struggles of his career a steadfastness of purpose over-riding all sensitiveness, and steadily staring grim despair out of countenance, the Circumlocution Office would have made a dead man of him long and long ago.

It was not only in the higher officials and cumbersome system of the great Government Departments that the progressive mind of Dickens saw need for reform. These he was constantly referring to, as in the famous passage in "Hard Times," when he speaks of a certain official who was "certain to knock the wind out of common sense, and render that unlucky adversary deaf to the call of time. He had it in charge from very high authority to bring about the great public office Millennium, when Commissioners should reign on earth." Dickens lodged the same protest against bad and foolish methods in his pictures of lesser Jacks-in-office. Mr. Bumble has become part

of the English language. The workhouse committee, the school official, Mr. Nupkins, the magistrate, the penitentiary officials in "David Copperfield," are dwellers of the evil land where Bumble rules. Dickens summarises the bad official in "Oliver Twist":

> If there is anything that is not to be tolerated on any terms, anything that is a type of Jack-in-Office insolence and absurdity, anything that represents in coats, waistcoats, and big sticks, our English holding-on to nonsense after every-one has found it out, it is a beadle.

"Obstinate adherence to rubbish" and "holding-on to nonsense" are two phrases which illustrate the advanced thinking of Dickens. They prove his Democracy and describe his progressive mind.

Apart from the general tenor of his writings and speeches, Dickens never actually proclaimed himself a Democrat in definite terms. That he was so, there is no doubt; and even if we had no other evidence, his enthusiasm over the establishment of the Second French Republic in 1848 would prove it. He wrote in enthusiastic French—of course not in extreme seriousness—to Forster:

> Mon ami, je trouve que j'aime tant la République qu'il me faut renoncer ma langue et écrire seulement la langue de la République de France! Vive la République! Vive le Peuple! Plus de Royauté. Plus de Bourbons! Plus de Guizot! Mort aux traîtres! Faisons couler le sang pour la liberté, la justice, la cause populaire! Recevez l'assurance de ma consideration distinguée, et croyez-moi, concitoyen, votre tout devoué, citoyen, Charles Dickens.

Dickens' attitude towards another important question proves how progressive was his thought. In his day the Trades Unions were young, and even enlightened opinion was often against the "right to combine." Other kinds of opinion were, as the author knew, actively hostile. Counsel for the Crown in a case in the 'thirties had vehemently denounced combination among the lower orders for industrial purposes as a political menace to the State. Hear Mrs. Sparsit in "Hard Times":

> "It is much to be regretted that the united masters allow of any such combination. Being united themselves, they ought one and all to set their faces against employing any man who is united with any other man. . . . These people must be conquered, and it's high time it was done, once for all."

This is not so very out-of-date for the utterance of the genteel housekeeper to a "nouveau riche" of the 'forties. In Mrs. Sparsit's words Dickens summed up the point of view of a class, and the passage is, of course, satirical. For himself he determined to get at the facts and resolved to see what a trade union and a strike were really like. He went to Preston at the time of a great trade dispute and, from a letter to Forster, was clearly disappointed. "There was no colour, no excitement—almost, you would say, no 'copy.'" But he made copy of it in a "Household Words" article, which conclusively proves him a Democrat. He describes there, in more vivacious and enthusiastic terms than those which his letter to Forster contained, how he visited a delegates' meeting, and what he thought of it:

> If the Assembly, in respect of quietness and order, were put in comparison with the House of Commons, the Right Honourable the Speaker himself would decide for Preston.

The strikers themselves made a deep and favourable impression upon him. He was struck by the calm of the men, whose lives were passed in " clash and hurry." He spoke of

> their astonishing fortitude and perseverance ; their high sense of honour among themselves ; the extent to which they are impressed with the responsibility that is upon them of setting a careful example, and keeping their order out of any harm and loss of reputation ; the noble readiness in them to help one another. . . .

Dickens was converted to the new idea of Trade Unionism. He knew, none better, that the workers needed protection, and had the confidence in the common sense of the British working class, which prevented him from seeing any danger to the safety of the State in the movement. It proves, once more, that Dickens was ever to the fore in the army of Progress.

From the wealth of material available it would be possible to select illustration after illustration to indicate the trend of Dickens' thoughts towards pure Democracy. It was not only in his novels, but in his public speeches, not only in his writings, but in his actions, that he showed the faith that was in him. A great humanitarian, he practised what he preached. His work for Democracy, if it could be measured, would doubtless prove as important and effective as that of

any champion whom the creed has drawn to its banner. Like all great Democrats, he saw that the one hope, the one remedy, for the distresses of mankind, the one path which could be followed with hope and optimism, was education; and he used all his eloquence and all his wonderful powers of persuasion in its cause. Blessed with long vision, he was not deceived by the fears, misgivings, and doleful prophecies with which Democracy had to contend. His faith in humanity was so strong that he did not shrink from change and experiment when the motive was a good one. He had no use for theories which had been disproved, and no respect for customs that were superannuated. He would fling aside all entanglements, even if they were ropes of silk, which hindered the march of mankind to the dawn of a better day.

Democracy in the Time of Dickens and the Present Day

A Comparison of Social Conditions

In discussing the stage reached in the advance of Democracy during the lifetime of Charles Dickens, the years 1840 to 1860 come particularly under review. During that period Dickens, by his writings and his public speeches, gave evidence of his intense sympathy with the majority in their great trials and difficulties, and identified himself with every movement which aimed at securing an amelioration of their conditions of life and their opportunities for advancement, self-improvement, and acquisition of knowledge. Many of the injustices and hardships against which Dickens fought were either removed or modified during his own lifetime, and, for this reason, the comparison between the Democracy which he knew and the Democracy which the present generation knows must be made in general terms. It can only consider the clauses of any particular Act of Parliament where the Act was of such importance as to influence the whole course of the people's lives.

Bearing in mind that during those twenty years, which must be reckoned as the best period of Dickens' life, Democracy was steadily advancing, it is still possible to draw a comparison between his time and the present day, and point to the directions in which enormous progress has been made, while suggesting

others, on which the energies of the Social Reformers might be concentrated.

It is important to remember, throughout the course of this review, that Dickens was a citizen of a very much smaller community than the Great Britain of to-day. Whereas the population of the British Isles in 1851 was a little over twenty-seven millions, the approximate figure is now forty-eight millions. A steady increase in population results largely from a diminishing death rate, which is always a sign of the advance made, not only in general prosperity, but in social conditions, particularly in those branches of science which come under the heading of sanitary and medical.

Omitting the exceptional period of the Great War, the death rate has steadily declined; and the following reasons may be advanced to account for such a satisfactory state of affairs: less crowded dwellings, better kinds of foods, superiority and cheapness of clothing, more temperate habits, and greater personal cleanliness.

A comparison between the ravages of disease among the population in the time of Dickens and the present day will reveal the enormous strides made by an awakened public conscience and a greatly-developed medical knowledge. To take, as an example, the prevalent disease of smallpox, it is found that in 1851 the death rate from this cause alone amounted to the enormous figure of 2,500 per million inhabitants. The matter was taken into such serious consideration that this appalling figure was reduced some twenty years later to 262 deaths per million inhabitants per year; and research and the introduction of vaccination have succeeded in practically eliminating the disease alto-

gether. In many of the recent years not a single fatal case has been reported ; and when smallpox does raise its ugly head, the death roll is kept at an astonishingly low figure. It is safe to say that if such visitations found conditions existing similar to those which Dickens knew, the loss of life would be terrible indeed. If other diseases, which brought such misery to the poor in the early Victorian period, are considered, the same improvement will be evident. The fatal cases from typhus were reduced from 193 per million inhabitants in 1869 to one per million forty years later ; while enteric claimed 390 per million inhabitants in 1869 as against 67 per million now. Even during the War, and the period of want which followed it, when conditions were such as to favour many serious outbreaks, disease was kept within bounds by medical science and improved sanitation. This successful campaign against disease is a striking example of the progress made in establishing better social conditions.

Turning to the question of infantile mortality, the statistics show a steady and persistent decline. At the present time the deaths per 1,000 of children under five years of age which occur during any one year have been reduced below half what they were in 1857. In 1851 there were 1,021 blind for every million people in the country, and 791 in every million were deaf and dumb. Fifty years later the figures had been reduced to 778 and 291 respectively. In 1924–5 the Ministry of Health spent £98,000 on the welfare of the blind under the Blind Persons' Act of 1920.

The sorrow and misery caused by disease were constantly in the minds of Dickens and his contemporaries ; and there is cause for great satisfaction and thankfulness that the persistent and successful

campaign against it is backed by a whole people, aware of its responsibility.

The conditions which existed in the industrial world during the first half of the nineteenth century were a scandal to civilisation and a disgrace to professing Christians. The capitalists ground down their work-people by long hours of labour and starvation wages, and their state was little better than that of slavery. The period of acute trade depression and widespread unemployment, which followed the Napoleonic wars, had thoroughly disorganised the labour market; and this state of affairs was aggravated by the wholesale introduction of machinery, which brought thousands and thousands of the best type of British workmen face to face with the fact that the market for their skill had vanished. The masters exploited this position to the full, and the condition of the labour world at that time was one of degradation and misery. The public conscience slept; and the working class, in their ignorance, had not learnt to combine for their own protection.

Perhaps there is nothing that paints so vivid a picture of that black period in the country's history as the treatment of children in the factories. Little boys and girls, even at the tender age of five years, were forced, by reason of the economic stress which pressed so heavily on their parents, to work long hours for a mere pittance, and were set to learn a trade before they had properly learnt to speak. That such a thing was tolerated and approved is a blot on the fair name of the nation, but that it was true is only too clearly shown by the vehement opposition with which Robert Owen's Factory Act of 1829 was met—an Act which limited the employment of

children between nine and sixteen years of age in the cotton mills to twelve hours a day.

The ugly story is continued in the accounts of the employment of women, among whom ghastly incidents of sweated labour were the general rule.

Such were the conditions of industrial labour at the commencement of the Dickens' period. A comparison between now and then shows, fortunately, a very great advance.

Even during the life of Dickens the improvement was commenced by a series of Factory Acts from 1829 to 1867. Under these Acts many restrictions were placed upon the employment of children and women, and such scandals as the chaining of little ones to a machine for long, dreary, monotonous work, and the labouring of women, stripped to the waist, in the coal mines, were swept out of existence. A ten-hours' day was established for women and young persons under eighteen; and a half-time system of education for children between nine and fourteen was introduced, which limited the maximum number of hours they could be employed per day to six and a half.

Progress was steady during the latter part of the nineteenth century, and in 1861 only two per cent. of children under ten years of age were employed. Ten years later the percentage was reduced to one, to be followed soon after by its total abolition. Again, the employment of older children, between the years of ten and fifteen, showed a marked decline. In 1851, 36.6 per cent. of males and 19.9 per cent. of females were engaged in wage-earning, figures which were reduced to 21.9 per cent. and 12 per cent. respectively by the beginning of the present century.

The appalling results, both moral and physical,

of hard, monotonous labour under terrible conditions were only fully revealed when the searchlight of public opinion was turned upon the scandal; and the result was a sweeping movement to transfer the children from the factories to the schools.

But the improvement of working class conditions is not due alone to the stirring of national feeling which their publicity produced, nor to the succession of Acts which public opinion has forced through Parliament. With the advance of education the working man has been taught to think for himself. He perceived the enormous difficulty with which the passing of any reform was attended, and noted the vehement opposition which invariably came from the privileged class who had controlled his destiny. He began, therefore, to consider other ways and means of strengthening his position, and the power of union and combination occurred to him. Thus were born the Trades Unions. Their establishment was attended with enormous difficulty and met with bitter retaliation from the masters. Perseverance and courage, however, won their reward; and the Unions grew rapidly in power and prestige, finally forcing official and capitalist recognition of their status. In the Trades Unions the working class found a shield of protection. Their power saved them from the worst forms of injustice and the greatest evils of oppression; generally raised the fruits of their labour; and, to a great extent, supervised and controlled the conditions under which they should work. The power of the Unions to-day is an effective safeguard against a relapse into the terrible hardships which shadowed the labour world in the time of Dickens. If wisely used, this power can lead the working class still farther along

the path of emancipation, at the same time impressing upon them their duties and responsibilties towards the community as a whole.

Democracy has now reached a stage in Great Britain where power rests in the hands of the people, and a proper exercise of that power will prevent the possibility of a return of those evils which so disgraced the early years of the industrial revolution.

The advance in the conditions of labour—an advance which must still continue while any case of injustice or want remains—has been accompanied by an increase in wages. Whereas in the time of Dickens the labourers were only paid as little as they would accept, which was generally insufficient to keep body and soul together, to-day they take out of an industry a share commensurate with its prosperity. They are not content merely to be able to pay for their absolute necessities, but aim at a general rise in their standard of life. There exist many cases of the co-operative system whereby the work-people share generously in profits which their labour earns.

A comparison between the wages earned in the time of Dickens and those earned to-day is difficult. The difference in the value of money, the great contrast in industrial conditions, and the variations in the prices of commodities, together with the rise and fall of such important items as rent, make a comparison in pounds, shillings and pence useless. What must be compared are *real* wages, and by real wages is meant the standard of comfort that they are able to purchase. While it is generally agreed that real wages have risen, the extent can only be ascertained by the examination of a hundred different problems. Statisticians, however, who have given their close

attention to this question, are in general agreement as to the advance recorded. Taking 67 as a general index figure for the period of 1848 to 1852, they affirm that by 1887 this had risen to 87, while just before the War the high-water mark of 102 had been reached. The War and the exceptional period of trade depression and unemployment, which has followed it, complicate still further the problem of comparison, but if one is content to study the progress made up to the commencement of this abnormal period, a general idea of the steady increase in the amount of real wages under Democracy through normal times may be grasped.

Those aspects of the social welfare of the people, which have already been discussed, show that a considerable advance has been made since the years 1840 to 1860. It is now necessary to examine the most important question of housing, and here, it will be found, that the results achieved by public opinion and legislation are not so satisfactory. Bad housing is "the main cause of drink and vice," writes Charles Booth in "Life and Labour." It is "of all causes the most potent in the creation of morally and physically degenerate types."

Through his novels Dickens put before the world a vivid description of the degradation and filth in which the poor of his day lived. The industrial revolution had driven the population to the towns, where there was not accommodation to receive them; and the evil of overcrowding existed in its most pernicious form. Since those days there have been many efforts made to diminish this evil; and while some success has been achieved, overcrowding still exists and is responsible for a great deal of suffering. Although a decline is noticeable, conditions leave much

to be desired. In 1841 the proportion of persons to a house in England was 5.44, while at the turn of the century it was 5.20. The cessation of building during the War caused a severe relapse, but these conditions are temporary and not normal. At the same time, the overcrowding which exists at the present time calls for serious attention on the part of the authorities, for it throws obstacles in the path of those whose duty it is to care for the Public Health, and is liable to have a permanent effect on the moral and physical welfare of the generation which is growing up.

How serious is the effect of overcrowding may be gathered from a few figures. In one of the years immediately preceding the War the death rate for the whole of England and Wales was 15.8 per 1,000, but in Shoreditch, where 29.9 per cent. of the population were living under overcrowded conditions, it was as high as 21.5 per 1,000. When the death rate in Finsbury of those living in one room was 38.9 per 1,000, the figure for the whole borough was only 19.6 per 1,000. An examination of this question in Glasgow revealed the fact that school children from one-roomed houses were, on an average, 4.7 inches smaller and 11.7 lb. lighter than those from four-roomed houses.

A comparison cannot be made between these figures and those relating to the Dickens' period, because statistics covering the years 1840 to 1860 are not available. There is every justification, however, for believing that conditions were then much worse, for considerable improvement has certainly been effected by the Acts for the housing of the working class passed in 1890, 1900, and 1903. What is known is that the ravages of disease, one of the most terrible results of overcrowding, were a thousand times worse in that

period ; and although most of the credit for the happier state of to-day must be given to the advance of medical science, yet the steps taken towards better housing conditions have, without question, had their influence.

The principal improvements which have been effected relate to the clearing of insanitary areas. Many of the worst slums of Dickens' land have been swept away and replaced by broad and clean highways. Unhealthy and obstructive buildings have been pulled down, and light and airy working-class dwellings have risen in their places. The Town Planning Act was passed, which aimed at regulating the growth of towns, and provided for parks and gardens and playgrounds, and adequate spaces between buildings. Public baths and wash-houses have been erected, and other conveniences provided.

In spite of these great efforts to tackle the problem, the evil of overcrowding remains, though in a less aggravated form. The magnitude of the task is enough to frighten the most ardent reformer, but though he cannot expect himself to cure the evil completely, he can make some impression upon it and leave it to his successors to continue the work.

Much remains to be done in the direction of demolition. Many of the houses in which the poor live are old and insanitary. Some are still in the same condition as they were in the mid-Victorian period. The property is neglected by the owners and ill-used by the tenants. Many districts now converted into slums have seen better days ; and the construction of these dwellings, while suitable for the well-to-do who originally occupied them, are most unsuitable for those who are now making them their home. Side by side with demolition should go the erection of solid, bright,

and airy houses. Much of the new construction is jerry-built and cannot last a great number of years. These methods of construction will not help to solve the problem of overcrowding, but rather complicate it in the years to come.

Treatment of Criminals

A comparison must now be made between the methods of dealing with criminals in the time of Dickens and the methods in force to-day. The prevalence of crime in the two periods can also be compared. For the purpose of this latter comparison due consideration must be given to the increase in the number and brutality of serious crimes evidenced in the last few years, for which the exceptional period of strain, imposed upon mankind by the War and its after effects, is responsible.

The criminal code which Dickens knew was vicious. It was only just prior to the period under review that the death sentence was abolished for such offences as forgery, shop-lifting, cattle-stealing, begging, and the like. Public executions were held at Tyburn, and transportation for what are now described as minor offences was the order of the day. Severity prevented the exercise of justice under the mistaken notion that extreme severity was the only safe deterrent.

Since those days a more humane code has been adopted. The death sentence can only be imposed for the most serious of offences, such as murder and treason ; public executions have been abolished ; and transportation has been replaced by penal servitude. The extent of these improvements can best be illustrated by a comparison of the amount of crime under the two codes.

For the years 1857–1861 the average number of persons tried annually for indictable offences was 265 per 100,000 of the population. The annual average fell to 140 per 100,000 of the population. This would seem to show that the framing of the criminal code on the lines of humanity is more effective than naked brutality. Unfortunately the post-war years of trade depression and unemployment have witnessed a return to the old figure.

Reform was nowhere more pressing than in the treatment of juvenile crime. In the days of Dickens children were punished, and even put to death, for offences which were committed through ignorance. A child was treated as if he possessed the same sense of responsibility and the same power to discriminate between right and wrong as an adult. To-day entirely different treatment is meted out to the minor, and more effort is directed towards reforming the young criminal than inflicting lasting disgrace upon him through punishment. This policy has been fully justified by results, as a comparison in figures proves. In 1861, 8,801 juveniles were convicted of crime. In 1903, with a population almost doubled, the number was only 1,119. In 1922 only three youthful offenders were sentenced to imprisonment.

In the Dickensian years a criminal was a criminal and dealt with as such. Since that time the Prison Act of 1898 and the Probation of Offenders Act 1907 have given power to judges to discriminate between the habitual criminal and the first offender, and to prescribe different treatment. This humane reform has rescued many a being from a life of crime and placed him once more on the straight path to decency and honesty, to the great gain of the community.

One more comparison can be drawn to illustrate the decline of crime under the new code. For the five years ending 1859 the yearly average of people sentenced to penal servitude was 13.4 per 100,000 of the population. Prior to the War it had fallen to 3.4 per 100,000.

Reform, however, has not been confined to the redrafting of the criminal code. The state of the prisons was a national disgrace. They were insanitary and overcrowded, and in some cases the inmates had not even room to lie down. Disease was rampant, and rare were the visits of the doctor. Prisoners were often kept in chains, and men and women were herded together irrespective of sex. The diet was such as to reduce them to a state of absolute weakness. The worst and hardest forms of labour were allotted to them under the supervision of cruel taskmasters. To-day prison administration is controlled under a uniform system, and questions of diet and labour and the like are laid down in hard and fast regulations which must be obeyed. Such practices as the treadmill have been abolished, and useful work has taken its place. Frequent inspections occur, and any abuses are discussed and dealt with. Men and women are kept in different prisons, and medical inspections by the doctor and visits by the chaplain are part of the routine.

In this department of social life there is no question of the enormous progress made from the state of affairs which Dickens so vehemently attacked.

Much the same humanising influence can be traced in the reforms which have dealt with the care of the insane. The treatment of these unfortunate people seventy or eighty years ago was appalling, and it was

not until the Lunacy Commission was formed that some of the worst abuses were cured. Cases occurred where the lunatics were chained to pillars, often naked, with no bed but straw. They were kept in solitary confinement under the most wretched conditions of cold and discomfort. There was no supervision, and they were subject to any cruelty their warders might devise. Since the practice of visits of inspection at frequent intervals and constant medical examination was inaugurated, the lot of this pitiable class has been bettered. There is, however, still much room for improvement.

Probably there is no department of social reform in which the nation has awakened more completely to its responsibilities than in the treatment of its paupers. Dickens has related how, in his time, neither common sense nor justice characterised the administration of the Poor Law, while in " Oliver Twist " he dwells on the gross mismanagement of the workhouses. Since the whole question was brought under the supervision of the Local Government Board, now the Ministry of Health, paupers have been treated more humanely. The workhouses have contained more comfort, and the health of the inmates has become the concern of the authorities. Much had been left to voluntary effort in the relief of pauperism, but the last fifty years has seen the realisation by the State of its responsibilities, a realisation which has materialised in the shape of several Acts for the relief of those in the most necessitous circumstances. Infirmaries have been established for the treatment of sick paupers, who had previously been wholly dependent on charity—a most unsatisfactory, and, in some cases, cruel condition of affairs. The education of pauper children has been

catered for, and the system of boarding children out with suitable foster parents has been adopted. Attacks on pauperism have been made in such important statutes as the Old Age Pensions Act, Widows' Pensions, the Health Insurance Act, the Unemployment Insurance Scheme, and many others. The correct policy is, not only to relieve, but to assist, to awaken a new self-respect and encourage the unfortunate to struggle on to a higher and better state. How superior is this policy to that of pushing the bottom dog further into the pit of degradation, as Dickens has again and again described, is best illustrated by the steady decline in the number of paupers per 1,000 of the population from 56.5 in 1850 to 22.1 before the War. In the present period of trade depression the figure has again risen to over 40 per 1,000.

If there was a direction, more than any other, in which Dickens saw hope for the struggling mass of humanity, it was the direction of education. He supported any movement and identified himself with any scheme which aimed at bringing knowledge within the grasp of the most humble citizens. His speeches and writings were full of allusions to this subject, which was so near his heart.

During his lifetime education depended practically on voluntary effort alone. It was essentially a class privilege, for the children of the lower orders of society were placed too early to work, in order to supplement their parents' scanty means of subsistence, to have time or opportunity for learning. At this period of history less than two-fifths of the children between six and ten years old, and less than one-fifth of the children between ten and twelve years old, attended any school at all. Certain grants from the Exchequer were

indeed, made, but these were spasmodic, and their amounts were only determined by results.

This unsatisfactory position attracted, in time, the attention of the Government, and the question of education was seriously taken in hand. With the prohibition of the employment of very young children in industry, the whole matter was looked upon in an entirely new light. The new line of thought culminated in the establishment of the Board Schools, supported out of the rates, by the Act of 1870. Government inspection was introduced, and grants from the Exchequer increased. A few years later elementary education up to a certain standard was made compulsory, while in 1891 free compulsory education was introduced. Side by side with this advance in elementary education went the development of the Secondary Schools, while the Technical Colleges, which had sprung up through the voluntary work of educational enthusiasts, were also brought under the wing of the Government and subsidised. The whole question of education, and the increasing work in connection with it, culminated, in 1897, in the creation of the Board of Education, whose duty it became to control education throughout the country, regulate examinations, and deal with the efficiency of the teachers.

While the enormous strides made give great cause for satisfaction, there is still room for improvement. The education of very few children, even to-day, is really completed, and the grant of universal suffrage in the upward march of Democracy has given this question an importance which it has never before possessed. The whole future of the State depends on the necessity of educating the boys and girls up to the responsibilities

which they are now called upon to bear as citizens.

In comparing the state of education to-day with that of the time of Dickens, it is interesting to note the enormous decline in illiteracy. In 1851 the percentage of illiterate males was 30.7, and of illiterate females 45.2. To-day it is rare indeed to meet a man or woman who cannot read or write.

All social reforms aim at a rise in the standard of comfort and an increase in the happiness of the great mass of the people. Since Dickens' time the national wealth has grown enormously, and in this all classes have shared. Between 1850 and the present day the average savings of the working class have risen from £1 1s. per head to £4 15s. 10d. per head. There has been a growth in small incomes, while real wages have increased. There has been a reduction in the hours of employment and more hours of leisure. The workers enjoy a greater variety in their food; meat is added to their diet—a thing unknown even thirty years ago—and fruit enriches many a working class table. Housing has improved, though further improvements are still necessary and urgent. Disease has been controlled, and provision made against sickness. Municipal enterprise has provided better lighting of streets, security, drainage systems, parks, recreation grounds, libraries, and public baths. Cheap travel and cheaper clothes are available. There are cheap amusements in the cinema and Sunday concert, and more holidays, while galleries and museums provide free entertainment and instruction. Finally, there is the gateway of opportunity opened at last by education, and working men take their places on the Treasury Bench.

Shakespeare and Dickens

William Shakespeare

1564–1616

Millions shall laugh or shed a tear
At Falstaff's humour or the woes of Lear.
England for e'er thy genius admires;
Thou, Shakespeare, shall reign till time expires.

Charles Dickens

1812–1870

There let him sleep lamented by a nation;
The good he did for us shall ne'er decay.
They live, the beings of his fine creation,
To make us glad for ever and for aye.

Resemblances in Career and Character

It would be quite impossible to attempt anything like an account of the lives or an analysis of the work of two such men as Shakespeare and Dickens in the space of a single essay ; but I believe it will prove interesting to show the curious similarity between their careers, and briefly to compare their art.

We can set the lives of these two great writers side by side and note the many similarities between them. I do not for a moment mean to say that there is any critical value in these coincidences ; they are simply interesting curiosities of literature.

Both started life poor, and died rich ; both began at the lowest step of the ladder of literature, and reached the highest pinnacle of fame ; both were born in country towns, and found fame and fortune in London ; both bought estates in the country to which they retired ; and both have had their birthplaces preserved.

Shakespeare made himself one of the foremost men in Stratford-upon-Avon by the purchase of New Place and other property : Dickens bought a home at Gadshill, close to Rochester.

In many respects, then, their careers were somewhat alike, not only in broad outlines, but even in some details.

Shakespeare and Dickens both suffered very much from the activities of piratical publishers. As to Shakespeare, Professor Pollard has well described his fight with the pirates, who published some of his plays

without his authority. Dickens in 1838 issued an amusing proclamation, in which Boz threatened dire vengeance on the " pirates," who had been " producing cheap and wretched imitations of his delectable works."

Shakespeare and Dickens were, apparently, men of similar character. Both were manly, fond of open air life, gifted with amazing vitality and great powers of observation; both were actors and lovers of the theatre; and both won artistic and monetary success in the realm of literature.

Swinburne often associated Shakespeare and Dickens, and made an interesting parallel of their lives. In his poem, " Comparisons," he says :

> Our Shakespeare, surely, daffed not
> More lightly pain aside
> From radiant lips that quaffed not
> Of forethought's tragic tide :
> Our Dickens, doubtless, laughed not
> More loud with life's first pride.
>
> When those, your chosen of all men,
> Whose honey never cloys,
> Two lights whose smiles enthrall men
> Were called at your age boys,
> Those mighty men, while small men,
> Could make no merrier noise.

Of Shakespeare's boyhood biographical knowledge is scanty. As to his education, he probably attended the Stratford Grammar School, like other boys in his town would do. There he would be taught English and Latin, while later on in life he probably acquired a working knowledge of French and Italian.

It is a mistake to speak of Shakespeare as an uneducated man, simply because we cannot definitely say where or how he gained his knowledge. With

Shakespeare, as with most men, the better part of his education was acquired by observation, by reading, and by experience of the world. Fortunately he had abundant opportunity of studying a grander volume, the infinite book of Nature, whose pages were unfolded to him in the country life, the lanes, the fields, the hedgerows, and the woods and hills of his own native Warwickshire.

There are legendary tales that he was brought up as a wool-dealer, a butcher, a schoolmaster, and so on, but they rest on no trustworthy evidence. Of his character as a youth we are also ignorant ; but stories, which gather round the early days of a man who afterwards becomes famous, are generally, if not actually true, founded on fact. Tales obviously incredible would never gain currency or live for any length of time.

There is a very general impression that we do not know much about the life of Shakespeare. As a matter of fact, we know more about him than about most of his contemporaries in the literary world ; though, of course, we know more of him as a poet and dramatist than as a man.

In what way Shakespeare passed his youth does not greatly matter. Aubrey says he was for a time a schoolmaster in the country. There is no proof of this : but whatever his occupation, he was acquiring a more perfect knowledge of the world, of human life and human nature, than he could have derived from a study of the classics.

Shakespeare and Dickens were not learned men in the ordinary sense of the term ; they were not classical scholars so far as book learning goes. But who shall say that they were any the worse for the want of a

classical education? It is not by education at school or university that literary genius is made. Indeed, it is remarkable how few great writers have been men of wide culture, though notable exceptions are Ben Jonson, Addison, and Browning. It was from nature and from experience of life that Shakespeare and Dickens obtained their knowledge of men and women, of places and events, which they put to such good use in their writings.

As regards Dickens, we know the life of the man so well and so intimately that we can safely decide how far his work was affected by his circumstances and training. Very often we can trace touches of autobiography in his novels and stories.

Shakespeare as actor, poet, and dramatist was received as a friend by such men as the Earl of Southampton, and was a not infrequent visitor at the court of Queen Elizabeth in his professional capacity. It was much the same with Dickens. The small boy, who had worked in a blacking factory, and who roamed neglected in the streets of London, was in after years a welcome guest wherever he went, and was at length received by Queen Victoria.

When Dickens was a boy, he learned to know London highways and by-ways and the seamy side of London life, and that knowledge he embodied later in his books. He had a few years at school, but acquired a knowledge which was far more serviceable to him than any amount of Greek and Latin. He learned of life by bitter personal experience, and collected raw material, which he wove into his romances and gave to the world.

Shakespeare began his work in London by working in the theatre, no doubt in a subordinate capacity. Next he became an actor, then a reviser of old plays,

then the principal dramatist and a shareholder of the Globe and Blackfriars Theatre Company, and finally a country gentleman, living in the largest private house in Stratford-upon-Avon, with a coat of arms and a considerable private fortune. He had had a career of unbounded prosperity, free from all pecuniary anxieties, well-known and honoured, with troops of friends, who accorded him full recognition of his towering genius.

Here, also, are resemblances to Dickens, who from being a lawyer's clerk, a reporter at a police court, a shorthand writer in the gallery of the House of Commons, and an author of short stories in an evening paper, rose from the lowest to the highest step of the ladder of literature. At twenty-four years of age, after the publication of "Pickwick," he suddenly found himself famous; and from that developed into the foremost writer of the Victorian era, and the friend and associate of the leading literary men of his time. England and America knew him, rejoiced in him, and were proud of him.

Their First Efforts at Writing

Almost Shakespeare's first effort at writing was his "Venus and Adonis," the long poem dedicated to the Earl of Southampton in 1593. In the following year his poem, "Lucrece," was printed. He won early success by adapting and revising old plays which had been cast aside and which in their new form brought fame and fortune to his Company. A number of books containing references to Shakespeare, which were published during his lifetime, show clearly that he was recognised as a poet and dramatist as early as 1592.

" England's Parnassus," compiled by Robert Allot, was published in 1600, and contains remarkable evidence of the popularity of Shakespeare's works at that date. The fact that ninety-five different quotations from his works are included in it proves that his fame was then well established. Francis Meres, in his " Wits Treasury," gives a detailed list of the names of Shakespeare's plays which had appeared up to the year 1598. In other contemporary literature there are over 160 references and allusions to his works between the years 1592 and 1616.

As a schoolboy, Dickens' first effort at writing was a crude tragedy called " Misnar, the Sultan of India," by which he excited the envy and admiration of his school-fellows. This he compiled from " Tales of the Genii." Some years later he reported political meetings for the " Morning Chronicle," and entered on his literary career in earnest in 1836, with the publication of his first book, " Sketches by Boz." At twenty-four years of age Dickens wrote " Pickwick," the most popular book of the Victorian era.

Both Shakespeare and Dickens showed their genius at an early age, and while still young, ranked among the greatest literary men of their time.

Both Patriots

Shakespeare is the most patriotic of English poets. In John of Gaunt's dying speech in " Richard II," Act II, Scene 1,

> This royal throne of kings,
> This sceptered isle . . .

he wrote the most stirring poem on England ever penned. Throughout his works there are many fine

passages on the same theme. In "Henry V" "Richard II," "King John," "Cymbeline," and elsewhere, are lines that touch the heart of the patriot and awaken deep love for the motherland.

Dickens also wrote of the patriotism of the home and homeland. He said that in the home should be taught that discipline, that respect for order and authority, which should make for good citizenship, and therefore for the larger patriotism of empire.

Both Actors

Both Shakespeare and Dickens were actors. Shakespeare probably began his public life as an actor. Dickens had the acting spirit and temperament. He was so fond of it that he was constantly engaged in amateur theatricals; and his fiction frequently bears the stamp of dramatic design.

Dickens acquired great intimacy with the stage, and was no mean exponent of the histrionic art. He excelled as actor, prompter, and stage manager—in fact, he was the life and soul of any theatrical enterprise on which he embarked. It was probably only the accident of an illness that prevented Dickens from choosing the theatre rather than literature for his vocation in life; for if he had been able to keep his appointment for an interview with the agents, Bartley and Kemble, he might have decided to go on the stage. Many of his characters are drawn from the profession —the Crummles and their talented company, Alfred Jingle, Jem Hutley, Mr. Loggins, and Wopsle. Others, like Micawber, are theatrical in their manner and speech.

Both Shakespeare and Dickens had a wonderful

knowledge and command of the English language, which they must have acquired by long and patient study after leaving school. Both were masters of humour and pathos ; both had remarkable imagination. They were men of great industry and capacity. Shakespeare was the first English writer to make a fortune by his work, and was a careful and far-seeing man of business, managing his investments with skill and prudence. Dickens was the first English novelist to earn really large sums of money. He left estate valued for probate at £93,000.

Their Associations with London

Though neither author was born in London, yet it is with the Capital that their fame is chiefly connected. Both came to London early in life, and found fame and fortune in the city. Both wrote much about London, and showed in their works great knowledge of the metropolis. Indeed, in order to know and understand London life in the reigns of Elizabeth and Victoria, one cannot do better than study the works of Shakespeare and Dickens.

The eras, with which their names are connected, are known from the two queens as the Elizabethan and Victorian, although Shakespeare lived well on into the reign of James I, and Dickens was born twenty-five years before Queen Victoria came to the throne. The interesting coincidence is, that they both flourished when an old age was dying, and a new age was being born ; and the work of both men was greatly influenced by the times in which they lived.

Londoners in particular have reason to be grateful

to them, for Shakespeare and Dickens are the two writers who enable us to travel back into the London of the past.

Already the London of Pickwick belongs to history. In Dickens' time it was a dull, dark, dismal place; and he has given us minute and truthful pictures of its bright and sombre sides, its riches and poverty, its virtues and vices. When Dickens was nine years old his family removed to London, where they experienced hard times. His father was arrested for debt, and he, himself, was put to monotonous, soul-crushing work in a blacking factory. But better times dawned in 1824, when the family affairs became less unsatisfactory, and the lad was taken away from the work he detested and sent to school.

In 1827 we find him an attorney's clerk in Gray's Inn; in 1833 he made his first appearance in print. It was a red-letter day for him, and the beginning of a splendid career. He tells us that his eyes were so dimmed with the joy and pride of his first success that he could not bear the street, and was not fit to be seen there.

The year 1836 brought fame to Dickens. The "Sketches by Boz" were published, and the monthly issue of "Pickwick" began on 31st March. To add to his happiness, he was married on 2nd April of that year. From this time onward all was success and good fortune, which we need not trace. No other author has enjoyed such a wonderful popularity or has been such a striking personality in his own generation. He died suddenly at Gadshill on 9th June, 1870, in the fifty-ninth year of his age.

When and for what reason Shakespeare left Stratford is not known. One tradition has it that he was

driven out by the consequences of a poaching affray, in which he was supposed to have been involved; but, presumably, he came to London because he wanted to make a career for himself. From 1585, in which year his twin children were born, we do not hear anything of him until we find him in London in 1592, a well-known actor and dramatist.

There are various legends which attempt to account for this period, the best known being that he gained a livelihood by holding horses outside the theatre while their masters witnessed the performance. Apparently he never achieved any great distinction as an actor. This is in accordance with the general rule, for no great dramatist has ever been a great actor also.

There is no need to deal with the details of Shakespeare's prosperous career as actor, manager, and dramatist. It will be sufficient to note that he proved himself a shrewd man of business, and that in 1611 he returned to settle down for the remainder of his life at Stratford. In little more than twenty years from 1591 to 1611, he had written the series of plays and poems which has earned for him his immortal name and undying fame. He died at Stratford on 23rd April, 1616.

Gadshill

Shakespeare and Dickens both made Gadshill immortal. The dramatist caused Falstaff and Prince Hal to rob the King's tax collectors and each other there. The scene took place on the spot memorable as the last and favourite home of Charles Dickens, who naturally liked the place because of its beautiful

Kentish surroundings. Apart from this, he was proud of its Shakespearean association.

Elizabethan Age Compared with the Victorian

The dark days of the Middle Ages were closed when Shakespeare wrote, and he lived to witness the dawn of a new era. In the sixteenth century a tide of mental freedom swept over England, and the minds of men were filled with new thoughts, new hopes, and new desires.

The Elizabethan age was one of discovery and experiment. Elizabethan seamen explored the material world, and Elizabethan writers opened up new worlds of art and literature. It was the age of Drake, Raleigh, Frobisher, and Hawkins in discovery, the age of Spenser, Sir Philip Sidney, Marlow, and Shakespeare in letters. Above all, it saw the beginning of our colonial expansion, and the laying of the foundations of our world-wide Empire. It was equally an age of literary enterprise and experiment, and witnessed the birth of a new and great national drama.

The merchants of England had become princes of commerce, the old nobility having squandered their power. Much had been taken away from them; and the middle classes had begun to rise to influence. It was an age when a revolution in the minds of men was taking place, and of that revolution Shakespeare was a son.

Dickens also lived in a period of transition and witnessed mighty changes. In a different way it was an era as marvellous as that of Elizabeth. Science and commerce made wonderful progress. In his early books Dickens described the time when men

travelled by coach or on horseback and when highwaymen infested the roads. In his latest stories railroads and steamships had revolutionised all travel.

The Victorian era was as distinguished for great writers as was the Elizabethan. Though no one could compare with Shakespeare, there were such men as Thackeray, Dickens, Ruskin, Browning, Tennyson, Carlyle, Lecky, and Macaulay. Again, it was a revolution taking place in the minds of men, and of that revolution and its freedom from tradition Dickens was a son.

Literature had reached a low ebb in the days immediately before both Elizabeth and Victoria came to the throne. During their reigns it scaled the artistic heights. Shakespeare was the most popular dramatist of his day, when the theatre occupied a more important place in the people's lives than it has ever done before or since. Dickens was undoubtedly the most popular writer of his time, when the novel achieved a distinction that it had never known.

Both Great Humorists

The humour of Shakespeare and Dickens was the result of their love for their fellow-beings. They had that essential gift of human sympathy which enabled them to see the humorous element in life ; and they loved the comical characters in which it resided.

The mind that drew the portraits of Falstaff and Dogberry, Pistol eating the leek, Bardolph and his red nose, and many other laughable figures, was a lovable and sympathetic mind. Charles Dickens also, by his transcendent humour, dominated all who came within range of his genius ; and it is true of

him, as it was true of Shakespeare, that he not only saw where the sources of laughter lay, but loved the humorous character and the thing he made ludicrous.

Bret Harte and all the modern humorists have followed along the lines of Shakespeare and Dickens, and have acknowledged their obligations to these two great masters of the art of humour. As Mr. Pugh says: "We all possess a sense of the ridiculous, a saving sense of humour; it saves our souls alive, it saves our hearts from breaking, it saves us from all manner of folly, wickedness, sorrow, and despair."[1]

Shakespeare, like Dickens, had a wonderful capacity for laughing, and for making others laugh. His humorous characters, with Falstaff at their head, have amused the whole world. The good humour of Dogberry has been equalled by no other writer except Dickens.

Dickens first started writing under the name of "Boz"; and after the publication in 1836 of his first book, "Sketches by Boz," everybody was asking the question, "Who is Boz?"

> Who the Dickens Boz could be
> Puzzled many a learned elf,
> But time unveiled the mystery,
> And showed that Boz was Dickens' self.

Boz was the author, Phiz the illustrator; and Boz and Phiz entertained the British public for many years with their humorous stories and illustrations.

"Pickwick" does not pretend to be a seriously constructed book, but a series of sketches and some studies of Cockney manners. After four or five parts had appeared, it suddenly sprang into a popularity that increased more and more, until at one time

[1] "Dickens Originals," by Edwin Pugh.

people could talk of nothing else but "Pickwick," while the publication of the monthly parts increased from 400 to 40,000 a month.

For a sense of humour Shakespeare and Dickens may, perhaps, be awarded equal palms, but there is no touch in Dickens of that keen wit for which Shakespeare is so distinguishable.

Shakespeare and Dickens as Social Reformers

If Shakespeare and Dickens were not social reformers in the modern sense, they certainly condemned the evils of their time and endeavoured to alleviate them.

In "Othello" we have Shakespeare's condemnation of strong drink; in "Twelfth Night," the overwhelming ridicule with which he attacks the practice of duelling, described as manslaughter and gross sin. In "King Lear" he pours scorn upon Popish and Puritan miracles; and in "The Winter's Tale" he refers to the burning of heretics. Shakespeare was a man far in advance of his own time. He denounced and condemned vices and follies, evils and cruelties, some of which were not abolished until 200 years after his death.

Dickens was a social reformer in a much larger sense. He never wrote a book without a purpose, and the object of most of his principal works was the alleviation of some sort of hardship or misery.

He satirised the weaknesses and follies of life. "Pickwick," with all its humour, exposed the anomalies, absurdities, and idiosyncrasies of the law, as it then existed. "Nicholas Nickleby" was written to expose the atrocious cruelties which were practised upon helpless orphans, and other neglected children,

in the small and cheap schools, where the sum charged was only £16 to £20 a year. The object of "Oliver Twist" was to expose the scandal of the parish system, and the misery and jobbery found in the parish union workhouses. The book told further of the dark haunts of vice and villainy, which at that time were a black blot on London and the cities of England generally.

Dickens painted these scenes of deep pathos with a powerful hand, and showed a righteous sympathy with the poor, the suffering and oppressed. He made clear to the world that a literary champion had taken the field, ready to do battle in the cause of virtue, justice, and humanity. This, then, is the great glory of Charles Dickens: he wrote his books with the high moral purpose of social reform, to help the helpless and to benefit humanity by the alleviation of human suffering. Dean Stanley referred to this crusade in his funeral sermon, when he said: "Dickens had the eye to see, the ear to hear, and the tongue to speak, and the pen to describe the sufferings of children, the sorrows of the English poor, and the miseries of those who could not defend themselves."

The unhappy inmates of the workhouses, the neglected children living in dens and cellars of our great cities, the starved and ill-used boys in remote schools in the country, had a champion who poured a ray of sunshine on their dark and miserable existence, and awakened a new interest in their forlorn and desolate condition. This unknown friend came forward and pleaded their cause with a voice that rang throughout all England, and was heard in the palaces of the great, as well as in the cottages of the poor. With the weapon of his genius the condition of those miserable creatures,

with their gaunt figures and haggard faces, was brought to the public notice; and scandalous conditions were exposed to the light of day, and drew the attention of the country towards wholesale reform.

In this Dickens did a giant's work. His pen exposed many a phase of cruelty and wrong, and excited the desires of good men to diminish the amount of evil and suffering that festered in the heart of our great cities. Nor was his satire without a useful purpose. His description of debtors' prisons, the Court of Chancery, the Yorkshire schools and schoolmasters, the Circumlocution Office, the spurious philanthropists, hypocritical pretenders to goodness, organised business swindlers, stony-hearted capitalists, and the brutal nurses and drunken Sairey Gamps of the time—all illustrate the power with which he worked to remove the evils and abuses of his day.

In the year 1849 Dickens wrote a letter to the "Times," drawing attention to the awful scenes attending public executions. The movement to abolish them, advocated by Dickens, was also supported by Thackeray and Carlyle, with the result that this terrible practice was discontinued.

Comparison of Their Works

It would be futile to compare the merits of the works of Shakespeare and Dickens: they wrote in different ages and with different aims and objects. It is impossible to apply any criterion which will tell us whether Shakespeare was greater as a dramatist than Dickens was as a novelist, for their gifts were diverse and their work distinct.

Shakespeare was more greatly gifted than Dickens.

To that we cannot be blind. He was a master of poetry as well as of prose, and unlimited in his power of character drawing. Dickens, on the other hand, was confined to prose ; and there was a range of character beyond his reach. Dickens never rose to the heroic or the tragic. He failed more than once when making strenuous efforts to draw a great figure of heroism, and produced only stilted puppets. His tragedy was too often sentimental melodrama. There is not a character in Dickens which Shakespeare could not have done as well, or better, even such typical characters as Jingle, Micawber, and Mrs. Nickleby. Conversely, such characters as Hamlet, Hotspur, and Othello are far beyond the power of Dickens at his greatest.

Their Plots

In the construction of their plots both writers were weak. Shakespeare, we know, was a busy man, and his time must have been very fully occupied with his various interests. He was an actor ; therefore there would be rehearsals and performances to attend. He was also part manager of the theatre, and, being a keen business man, we may be sure did his fair share of work. Further, there was the writing of a long series of plays, which could have been done only by a very facile writer. Indeed, Webster pays a tribute to his copious industry.

That he was a man of many interests, we are informed by Heminge and Condell, his friends and fellow-players, who were responsible for the production of the First Folio edition of the plays in 1623. In their address to the readers they say : " His mind and hand went together, and what he thought he uttered

with that easiness that we have scarce received from him a blot in his papers."

The plots of Shakespeare's plays were about equal in merit to those of most of the dramatists of his time. He did not trouble to develop entirely original plots out of his head. Like other dramatists, he took such material as was ready to his hand and suitable for his purpose, going to histories, romances, novels, and old plays for what he needed. Many of his characters, also, he found ready to his hand in outline. He elaborated them, filled them in by his genius, and made them live.

In the historical or chronicle plays, plot is not expected. They are merely stage versions of history. In the comedies and tragedies, however, a reasonable and probable plot would not have detracted from the merit of the prose and verse dialogue, nor from the splendour of the character drawing. Plot, though, was not a strong point in the Elizabethan drama; and so wonderful is Shakespeare's genius, that when we witness a presentation of his plays, he makes us forget all improbabilities and absurdities.

With Dickens the case was probably different. For all we know, Shakespeare may have possessed the ability to forge a good plot, but Dickens was apparently incapable of doing so. Dickens' stories meander along in an indefinite way and frequently are more than improbable. But as with Shakespeare, we can forgive all defects in this direction because of the delight and interest we take in the characters.

Dickens always set to work on a story with a general idea of what was going to happen and particularly of what the end was going to be. But his characters were alive; and as the work progressed, they some-

times took the reins into their own hands and out of his, so that the tale often terminated quite differently from what he had intended.

What militated so much against Dickens' plots was the method of publication. The majority of his novels were published in monthly parts, and this prevented the development of a clear-cut and well-planned plot. Each monthly part had to end up with a situation sufficiently interesting and exciting to stimulate in the reader a desire to know what was coming next. To cut a plot up into so many compartments does not help it to run smoothly or naturally.

The construction of a plot for use in a play and for use in a novel differs very greatly. The dramatist must tell his story in a very short time, and is nowadays strictly limited by the scene painter to the number of scenes which he can use. The loose construction of Dickens' plots is best realised when an attempt is made to dramatise one of his novels. It is almost impossible to condense the plot to a connected and easily-followed dramatic story. Hence few adaptations of Dickens' novels have proved thoroughly satisfactory in the theatre.

Their Skill in Character-Drawing

It is in the expression and delineation of character that Shakespeare and Dickens excel, for both knew how to depict the working of the human heart and soul. They possessed an apparently inexhaustible power of creation, which is one of the prerogatives of genius. They could create a multitude of characters who lived, acted, and spoke as real living beings. Their chief interest lies in this power of characterisa-

tion. Here it is that Shakespeare proves himself the master-dramatist.

Both Shakespeare and Dickens had the power, given only to a genius, to create laughter or tears in sympathy with their characters, making us love, fear, hate, or despise them, as if they were living people. Thousands have felt heart-broken at the sufferings of Oliver Twist, indignant at the brutality of Bill Sikes, and horrified at Nancy's cruel fate. Thousands have laughed at the whimsicalities of Pickwick and Sam Weller, and many thousands more have wept over the death of little Nell. That simple, pathetic story has touched the heart of the world more deeply than the most polished romance ever written. Dickens' great characters have taken a firm hold on the hearts of his countrymen, because they are natural, true to life, and harmonise so exactly with the station in life in which they are presented.

The art of pathos, the power of making people laugh or weep at his bidding, were his to a degree. In this he was never excelled ; and justly has he been called " the lord of laughter and tears." As Mr. Pugh says, " The true creative artist invariably endows all his subjects with some quality of his own genius, and transfigures and glorifies them." [1] Dickens paints not individuals but types ; he shows us men and women, scenes and incidents, which suggest to us people we have known ourselves.

The delineation of character, then, was an art of which both Shakespeare and Dickens were masters. We have grown so used to their men and women that we never think of them as caricatures. We accept them as universal types, although they are frequently

[1] " Dickens Originals," by Edwin Pugh.

grotesque, highly coloured and improbable. Mr. Pugh, touching on this in his "Dickens Originals," says, "Set Malvolio against Pecksniff, and we see the same type of man, or Falstaff against Micawber, and you will see that they are all alike, incredible and yet living figures, and types of figures that we may have probably met ourselves."

In Dickens Sikes and Fagin, and in Shakespeare Edmund and Iago, are criminal characters, who reveal the psychology of vice and crime and display the attitude of evil mentalities towards moral issues. Shakespeare took the dust of "Holinshead's Chronicles" and breathed into them the breath of life. Dry history became transformed into great works of dramatic art and the famous dead lived again. In the same way Dickens transformed Sam Weller from an ugly, shapeless lump of clay into a world-famous character.

Dickens rarely resorts to psychological analysis in his delineation of character, as Shakespeare does. Shakespeare shows us two Macbeths, the outer one, known to the gracious King Duncan and his subjects, and the inner one, known to Lady Macbeth and the spectator. The trend of Shakespeare's art is to delineate the inner life in all the vividness with which Macbeth realises it himself in his inmost soul. Dickens' portraiture, on the contrary, is generally of the outward man as the key to the inward. Mr. Crotch has truly said that "Dickens stands supreme for that superb gift of characterisation which has stood unrivalled in our literature since the time of Shakespeare."

It is difficult to classify Dickens' creations of original characters, covering as they do all sorts and conditions of men, and including almost every class,

profession, and occupation. Their diversity is, perhaps, the most striking proof of his genius, as it is the principal reason for his unprecedented popularity. In this delineation of character Shakespeare occupies a unique position. Like a creator, a master mind, he sits enthroned, surrounded by his 1,200 characters, who owe everything to him—existence, fame, originality, individuality—and speak and act only in obedience to his requirements.

Falstaff is a colossal figure of fun, yet, when we look closely at the ingredients of his character, we see that they could have been used also for the making of a most revolting villain. Falstaff in essence is a liar, thief, drunkard, coward, and profligate—quite enough vices for one man. But these shortcomings do not seem to injure anyone unless it be himself.

His failure as a thief is made ludicrous; so is his cowardly conduct on the field of battle. We laugh at him, which we could not have done, if his attack on the merchants at Gadshill had resulted in serious injury or his cowardice in loss of life. His lies always come home to roost, ending in his own discomfiture; and his attempted profligacy in the "Merry Wives of Windsor" brings his own undoing.

Falstaff is a living character, distinct from all other cowards, and all other fat, boasting men. As we think of him, we are blind to his faults, remembering only the fun with which the fat knight has provided us; and we naturally feel sorry when the news comes of the death of the hoary-headed old sinner while babbling of green fields.

Shakespeare, I think, went deeper beneath the surface of his characters than did Dickens. Shakespeare exposes Falstaff's nature to us through and

through. Sairey Gamp is comic, not in herself, and not on account of any sense of humour possessed by her, but because of the funny things she says.

Shylock and Fagin

The two Jews, Shylock and Fagin, help us to understand the very different outlook upon life of an Elizabethan and a Victorian writer.

In order to grasp Shakespeare's meaning, we must approach his plays with the mental attitude of a contemporary playgoer. Perhaps no Shakespearean character has been so grossly misrepresented on the stage as Shylock. Before the time of Macklin, the Jew was interpreted as a comic character; while Sir Henry Irving depicted him as an almost tragic and pathetic figure, deserving the sympathy of the audience, as if he were the hero instead of the villain of the play. This was not the Jew that Shakespeare drew; it was not the character that Shakespeare had in his mind, namely, a type true of his race. Such a misrepresentation would not be accepted by any modern audience to-day, any more than it would have been acceptable to an Elizabethan audience.

In "Oliver Twist," Dickens described Fagin, a Jew of the Victorian period, who was a trainer of thieves and a receiver of stolen goods. Most of the offenders in those days were Jews.

Mrs. Davis, a Jewish lady, wrote to Dickens in 1863 complaining of this attribution and urging that the character of Fagin was an injustice to her people. The original correspondence, which I have in my possession, shows that Dickens in his reply to Mrs. Davis says, "Fagin in 'Oliver Twist' is a Jew, because

it is unfortunately true of the time to which the story refers ; but surely no sensible man or woman of your persuasion can fail to notice—firstly that all the rest of the wicked people are Christians ; and secondly that he is called a Jew not because of his religion but because of his race." However, in order to please the lady, Dickens made amends in a later book, "Our Mutual Friend," where he ennobled the character of Riah, the very good Jew, who is contrasted with a very iniquitous Christian.

One of Dickens' great friends was Sergeant Talfourd, who afterwards became a judge. To him "Pickwick" was dedicated, and himself was the original Tommy Traddles. In 1844 Talfourd assisted Dickens to put an end to the piracy of his writings, every one of which had been reproduced by dishonest publishers, with certain small changes sufficient to evade the law and adapt them to penny purchasers. Parley's penny library of 1842 was a well-known example of the pirates of the time.

Dickens described only two Irish characters—Mr. Bevan's footman in "Martin Chuzzlewit," and Frederick O'Bleary in "Sketches by Boz." Captain Macmorris in "Henry V" is the only Irishman described by Shakespeare.

Dickens' Admiration for Shakespeare

Dickens was a great admirer of Shakespeare, and most of his speeches contained quotations from his works. He assisted in the Shakespeare Tercentenary of 1864 and chose the title of his magazine, "Household Words," from "Henry V," "Familiar in their mouths as household words." In 1848 Dickens took an active

part in raising funds for the Curatorship of Shakespeare's birth-place in Stratford-on-Avon. This movement resulted in the purchase, restoration, and preservation of the house, and Dickens' letter to Mr. Robert Lamond of that date is, therefore, of Shakespearean interest.

There are eighteen different references and allusions to Shakespeare in Dickens' works. In "Nicholas Nickleby," chapter 27, Mrs. Wititterly at the play says to Lord Verisopht: "Do you know, my lord, I find I take so much more interest in his (Shakespeare's) plays, after having been to that dear little dull house he was born in! . . . I don't know how it is, but after you've seen the place and written your name in the little book, somehow or other you seem to be inspired; it kindles up quite a fire within me."

Again, in the same novel, chapter 48, there is this reference: At Crummles' farewell party "there was a literary gentleman present who had dramatised in his time two hundred and forty-seven novels as fast as they had come out—some of them faster than they had come out—and *was* a literary gentleman in consequence! . . .

"'Shakespeare dramatised stories which had previously appeared in print, it is true,' observed Nicholas.

"'Meaning Bill, sir,' said the literary gentleman. 'So he did. Bill was an adapter, certainly, so he was —and very well he adapted too—considering!'"

Two Men of Genius

Shakespeare and Dickens were two men of the most extraordinary genius ever known in the whole history

of English literature ; their names are world-famous ; and their works have been translated into the languages of all civilised peoples. But notwithstanding Shakespeare's wonderful gifts, and the still more wonderful use he made of them, it is doubtful if he is appreciated by his countrymen as he should be. The day of his greatest popularity is yet to dawn, as it surely will.

Professor Morse has well said,[1] "Shakespeare labours under certain disadvantages which are a drag on his popularity, and a hindrance to his being generally read and appreciated as he should be by the masses of the people." His plays having been written for the stage, are necessarily cast in a dramatic form, and perhaps no form of literature is more tedious and trying to the ordinary reader. There are thousands of people who would prefer to read the worst novel than the finest drama ever written.

There are probably a hundred people who read Dickens to one who reads Shakespeare, though Shakespeare's writings have a far greater range than those of Dickens, and as pure literature are on an incomparably higher plane.

With the single exception of Shakespeare, among English writers no other author exceeds Dickens in yielding so many sentences on each page of sterling value in themselves. One page of Dickens contains as much incident as a whole chapter in an ordinary novel ; and few authors can be read with such certainty of finding fresh pleasure at every perusal.

Genius is of many kinds. A close study of Shakespeare's plays and Dickens' novels will not enable us to balance the greatness of the one writer against that of the other, but it does enable us to see that Dickens

[1] "Back to Shakespeare," by Mr. Morse.

possessed many of the powers that made Shakespeare supreme. Both men had great gifts of observation; both were great creative artists, who have opened new worlds for us; both had the enviable sense of humour, and both excelled in the field of characterisation.

Emerson said: "The poetry of the vulgar has yet to be written." Dickens found that poetry in the hearts of the people, and has done more than any other author, except Shakespeare, to show that one touch of nature makes the whole world kin.

Dickens' works are characterised by a high moral aim and a pure moral tone. The author of the "Old Curiosity Shop," "A Christmas Carol," "Nicholas Nickleby," "Oliver Twist," preached his gospel of charity and lovingkindness as no other author had done before. With all his faults, he was the most powerful and original creator of literary characters since our master-dramatist.

Shakespeare's will begins with these words: "I commend my soul into the hands of God my Creator, hoping and assuredly believing through the only merits of Jesus Christ my Saviour to be made partaker of life everlasting." Dickens' will begins: "I commit my soul to the mercy of God through our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ, and I exhort my dear children humbly to try to guide themselves by the teaching of the New Testament in its broad spirit."

There is something eminently noble, splendid, and glorious in the great careers and vast achievements of these two mighty men of genius, in the permanence of their fame, in the homage and gratitude they have evoked. Their brightness knew no overclouding, for while their genius was at its brightest and best, while

they were at the zenith of their fame, they themselves passed beyond mortal knowledge.

So popular was Dickens, so well known and so great a public favourite, that when his death came all too suddenly, the people felt as if they had lost a personal friend. They knew and admired his genius; they were proud of him as a gifted writer, a prince of story-tellers, a master of fiction, and England's greatest novelist. His works are quoted, not only through the length and breadth of our land, but wherever the English language is spoken; and his name is better known than that of any Englishman of his century.

The church at Stratford-upon-Avon contains the remains of our great national poet, and the national shrine at Westminster Abbey shelters the tomb of England's greatest novelist—two of England's most illustrious sons, whose name and memory can never fade. Of Shakespeare and Dickens it can be truly said in the words of Longfellow:

Lives of great men all remind us
We can make our lives sublime,
And departing leave behind us
Footprints on the sands of time.

Byron's Life and Works

To pass severe censure on faults of character, without taking into full consideration the general circumstances and atmosphere in which the maligned individual lived, is a serious mistake. Not only does it prevent a sound, general opinion being formed on an historical figure, but it is harsh and unjust and totally lacking in common-sense. A critic living in an age of strict morality, such as the mid-Victorian, is unable to criticise with any degree of fairness the acts of one whose existence was shadowed and influenced by the licentious freedom of the Regency. There is a tendency to dwell on falls from virtue, and to pass unnoticed the more important qualities of genius, intellect, imagination, and beauty of thought. All sense of proportion is lost, and no considered judgment is possible. This is a danger which must be seen and avoided, if historical appreciation is to be worth anything.

The case of Byron illustrates this point as clearly as any other that could be mentioned.

The austerity of the post-Byron period in England prevented the poet's countrymen from recognising his great ability. The products of his poetic genius were wilfully depreciated, because his morals fell short of what the strictness of the time demanded. Despite the fact that Goethe declared that England had produced no poet to excel Byron with the exception of Shakespeare, despite the fact that he was hailed by foreign lands as a heaven-sent bard, he was not granted

a place among the great in the national shrine of Westminster Abbey. It is on the Continent, not in his own land, that his memory is ever green. It is beyond the seas isolating Britain that he is accorded a place among the highest in the realm of literature. Some English critics decry his genius and belittle his powers, for the censure of the Victorian era still blinds us to a true appreciation of his worth.

A calm, impartial study of the conditions in which Byron's young life was passed will explain, without excusing, those shortcomings which have irrationally prevented men from forming a fair estimate of his work. In England more attention has been paid to the mysteries of his private life than to the worth and importance of his poetry.

There have been few periods in English history to which the word "disreputable" can be more truly applied than that of the Regency. Licentiousness was rife, intrigue flourished, wanton dissipation among the higher orders was the rule. That downward course in morals which usually accompanies a great war period like the Napoleonic, and which was sufficiently in evidence during the recent European upheaval, was seen. Byron was a member of a caste in which these conditions were at their worst, and the influence of this environment upon his impressionable nature was enormous.

As if the moral looseness of the Regency were not sufficient handicap to the growth of the young poet's character along virtuous lines, the recklessness of his own parents was added, a corrupting influence that was even greater. Byron suffered cruelly from heredity; germs of profligacy were in his blood, for he was singularly unfortunate in both his parents.

He came of a race of Byrons, or Burons, which stretched back to the Conquest. They were a race of fighters. Seven Byrons fought for their King at Edgehill, and the family greatly distinguished itself throughout the civil wars. The poet's father, John Byron, a captain in the Army, who married Catherine Gordon of Gight, as his second wife, was as untamable as his "wicked" great-uncle, who had earned the name of "The Wicked Lord." His wife's property, which was considerable, fell into his hands and quickly vanished in his dissipations. After their marriage in 1785, he took her to France. They soon returned; and their only child, George Gordon, was born in Holles Street, Oxford Street, London, on 22nd January, 1788. When John Byron fled from his creditors to France in 1791, where he died the same year, Mrs. Byron took her child to Aberdeen. There she had to live on the small remnant of her means, amounting to £150 a year.

Such were the influences that surrounded Byron and such were the evils which heredity laid upon him. That they made indelible marks upon his sensitive temperament is easy to understand. They were circumstances which he could not control; and though it may be right to say that he should have fought against them, it would have required a stupendous, almost superhuman, effort to free himself. That his soul often revolted against the degradation of it all is proved by his recorded utterances and his written thoughts. When in Greece he penned the following words:

> "Poverty is wretchedness, but it is perhaps to be preferred to the heartless, unmeaning dissipation

of the higher orders. I am thankful that I am clear of that and my resolution to remain clear of it for the rest of my life is immutable."

That Byron was susceptible to good influences as readily as to bad is shown by his love for his nurse, Mary Gray, who counteracted to some extent the evil impressions made upon him. From her he obtained a thorough knowledge of the Bible, and this he held to throughout his life. It proves that, had the whole atmosphere surrounding his childhood been different, those failings, which have begotten a refusal to recognise his genius, would not have damaged him.

In 1798, Byron, at the age of ten, succeeded his great-uncle in the title, and inherited the family seat of Newstead Abbey in Nottinghamshire, which was granted by Henry VIII to his ancestor, Sir John Byron, on the dissolution of the monasteries. The family moved from Aberdeen, where the poet had attended the Grammar School for four years, and later on occupied the mansion, which was in a ruinous condition. Mrs. Byron succeeded in obtaining a civil pension of £300 a year, which was a useful supplement to her meagre income. She took her son to a doctor for a malformation of the feet, having previously consulted quacks, whose treatment, instead of curing the complaint, had aggravated it. He went then to Dr. Glennie's School in Dulwich, 1799, which he attended until he entered Harrow in 1801. His life there was remarkable for the passion of his friendships and his affection for the Rev. Dr. Joseph Drury, whose pupil he was. At school he made no special mark, being idle and reading only by fits and starts. In spite of his lameness, he played games with enjoyment

and energy, and cricket and boxing claimed his attention. His devotion to sport continued when he entered Trinity College, Cambridge, in October, 1805.

Before his university days he had already had several love affairs. He contracted a deep passion for a distant cousin, Mary Anne Chaworth, who only laughed at him; and he was acutely distressed when another cousin, Mary Duff, whom he claimed to have loved for years, married. These unfortunate romances affected him strongly; and at Cambridge he plunged into a life of pleasure, and ran into debt.

In this period falls the beginning of his literary work. In 1807 a revised collection, entitled "Poems on Various Occasions," was printed for private circulation; and later in the same year he published his first book of poems, "Hours of Idleness," which met with a certain amount of indulgent criticism, but was savagely attacked in the "Edinburgh Review." This attack spurred him to retaliate; and early in 1809 appeared his famous satire, "English Bards and Scotch Reviewers," which ran to several editions.

During these years Newstead had been let to Lord Grey de Ruthven, and was vacated by him in a ruinous state of repair. Nevertheless, Byron, whose aristocratic pride in ancestry was strong, held his coming-of-age celebrations in the family home. The incident of several students drinking burgundy from a human skull has been emphasised to suggest that Byron organised reckless orgies at Newstead, but according to Moore this was not so, the reports having been greatly exaggerated. On the other hand, he says, everything was carried out simply and without expense.

In 1808 he left Cambridge, and in the next year took his seat in the House of Lords. His obscurity and

poverty were such that he only found someone to introduce him with the greatest difficulty. Although his "English Bards and Scotch Reviewers," made some impression, yet he lived in a position of isolation; and, beset with money difficulties and feelings of dissatisfaction and discontent, he resolved on an extensive trip abroad.

In July, 1809, he went for his first tour on the Continent, and sailed from Falmouth to Lisbon accompanied by his friend, Hobhouse, afterwards Lord Broughton. From the Portuguese capital he passed across Spain to Seville and Cadiz, and thence to Gibraltar. He went on to Malta, and from there to Prevesa, a seaport in Albania. In September he visited Ali Pasha at Tepeleni, and nearly lost his life in a Turkish warship on his return. In November he set eyes on the place where he was destined to end his days fifteen years later—Missolonghi. After staying at Patras, he proceeded to Athens, which he reached on Christmas Eve. In the spring of 1810 he visited Smyrna, Ephesus, and Constantinople, and performed his memorable feat of swimming the Hellespont. In July he was back in Athens and made a tour of the Morea. He contracted a dangerous fever, which impaired his constitution and left him liable to malaria. He spent the winter of 1810–11 in the Greek capital, and in the following summer returned to England via Malta, reaching Portsmouth on 15th July.

The effect upon him of this extensive foreign tour is seen in the poetical works which now came from his pen. He was on the threshold of fame, but at the moment was surrounded by financial difficulties. Mrs. Byron, pressed by creditors, had been quite unable to meet their demands. Before he could reach

her, she died, 1st August, 1811, of "a fit of rage caused by reading the upholsterer's bills." (A Nottingham firm of upholsterers had put in an execution at the Abbey for £1,600.) Byron was greatly moved by the loss of his mother, and his sorrow was intensified by the death of several other friends and relations within a few short months.

In October, 1811, Byron took lodgings in St. James's Street, and arranged with Murray, with whom his connection now commenced, for the publication of the first two cantos of "Childe Harold," which he had brought back with him from his travels. The poem appeared in March, 1812. "The effect," says Moore, "was electric, his fame seemed to spring, like the palace of a fairy king, in a night." Byron made speeches in the House of Lords with considerable ability, but his literary triumph turned his thoughts away from political ambition. In quick succession he wrote, "The Giaour," "The Bride of Abydos," "The Corsair," "Lara," and became the spoilt darling of society, the poetical wonder of his age.

The effusive admiration of women overwhelmed Byron at this period of his life. Romance surrounded him. He was adored, almost worshipped, for he was handsome, brilliant, charming, and since reputed to be dangerous and wicked, fascinating. He plunged into a whirl of pleasure, intoxicated, as it seems, by his success. There were intervals of self-condemnation and anxious foreboding, but they did not interrupt his intrigues and amours. The affair with Lady Caroline Lamb, the brutal letter by which he ended it, written on the crested notepaper of his new favourite, Lady Oxford, the array of women with whom he became involved—all show that he was infected with

the evil and licentious character of the days of the Regency. When the circumstances of that profligate age, his own heredity, temperamental failings, and the admiration which he had won, are all taken into consideration, it is not surprising that he succumbed to temptations and trod paths which have caused his genius to be hidden behind a cloud of social disapproval.

Early in the year 1815 Byron was married. With the aid of Lady Melbourne, a match was arranged with that lady's niece, Miss Anna Isabella Milbanke. Anna was strict and practical, with a taste for mathematics and theology; and not one single thing in common could be found between the two. From the start it was doomed to failure.

After the wedding at Seaham on 2nd January, the pair went away for their honeymoon before settling at No. 13, Piccadilly Terrace, which was their home during their brief life together. For a time there were grounds for hoping that the experiment would be a success. Difficulties soon appeared, however. Financial straits still handicapped the poet, and creditors dunned him. He was compelled to sell his library of books, and the loss made him irritable and angry.

After the birth of his daughter, Ada, in December, 1815, troubles became more serious. Byron's wife did not understand him. The union proved unhappy. Following many painful disagreements, it was dissolved by a formal deed of separation in 1816, after Lady Byron had returned to her father's roof.

Deserted by his wife, attacked in the newspapers and grossly maligned, Byron left England never to return. But his foreign travels made a man of him; and he lived to hate the memory of the years he had

wasted in London Society. All his greatest poetry was written after he had left England ; and he achieved the distinction of becoming a poet of European reputation during his own lifetime—an honour reserved for few Englishmen.

In April, 1816, he sailed for Ostend. After visiting Brussels and the field of Waterloo, he travelled by the Rhone to Geneva, which he reached in May. He took the Villa Diodati and met the Shelleys and Miss Clairmont, with whom he had one of his amorous entanglements. Byron and Shelley made a tour of the lake in June and visited the castle of Chillon. The friendship with Shelley had a profound influence on Byron's mind and greatly enhanced his power as a poet. To this period belong the third canto of " Childe Harold," " The Prisoner of Chillon," and " Manfred." When the Shelleys had returned to England, Byron went with Hobhouse to Milan and thence to Venice via Verona, where he stayed for three years. In January, 1817, Miss Clairmont gave birth to a daughter, Allegra, for whom Byron had a great affection. When the little girl died in 1822, he was overcome with grief.

At Venice he indulged in low forms of pleasure, undermining his constitution and producing visible signs of the beginnings of physical decay. His brain was, however, as brilliant as ever, and he wrote the fourth canto of " Childe Harold," " Beppo," and the beginning of " Don Juan," which is admitted to be his greatest work.

Byron was, at times, overwhelmed with disgust at the life he was leading. In his heart he hated it ; and had the unfortunate influences under which he had been condemned to live been different, this shadow

would never have been thrown across his genius. The fame of his poetry was now resounding over Europe. He was the idol of a continent and had won renown which had fallen on no other man of his period. For Englishmen, who are so prone to discredit Byron, it is difficult to understand to what a height he had climbed in the affection and admiration of European peoples.

He was rescued from the depths to which he had fallen during the sojourn at Venice by a new attachment, which was destined to last for four years and to win a constancy from Byron never known before. The lady was Teresa, wife of Cavaliere Guiccioli, and daughter of Count Gamba of Ravenna. She had married a husband many years older than herself; and when she met Byron in the spring of 1819, being then only nineteen, she fell instantly in love with him. When she left Venice to return to Ravenna, she sent for him, and he followed.

At Ravenna he wrote "The Prophecy of Dante," at the request of the Countess. It was a revolutionary poem, intended as a message of freedom to the Italian nation, and added to his great and growing reputation as a champion of liberty and hater of despotism. He attacked the Continental Powers, and England in particular, for the betrayal of Venice; and his words were like a clarion call to those suffering under a sense of tyranny and oppression.

At this period Byron was rich. He had overcome his early scruples about receiving money for the publication of his poems and now drove hard bargains with his publisher. In 1817 he had at last consented to sell the ancestral home of Newstead and received for it 90,000 guineas. Other moneys came to him;

and he was generous to the poor and contributed largely to societies and organisations for the cause of freedom.

The Countess's family, the Gambas, were ardent Liberals and drew Byron into a political conspiracy at Ravenna. He was elected " capo " of the " Americani," a branch of the Carbonari, and his time was employed in buying arms and storing them against the occasion of a rising. He was admitted into the secret conferences of the conspirators, and his advice and help were eagerly sought. The revolution came to nothing, and the Austrians compelled the Gambas, including the Countess, to leave Ravenna. Byron himself was spied upon by agents of the Austrian Embassy, but his standing as a British nobleman prevented interference with him.

Busy as he was with the Ravenna plot, he found time still for his active pen. He translated the first canto of Pulci's " Morgante Maggiore " and wrote " Marino Faliero," the fifth canto of " Don Juan," and " Sardanapalus." After the revolutionary plans had come to nought, he began " Cain," the beauty of which earned the enthusiastic praise of Goethe.

Byron stayed on at Ravenna after the Countess had left, but at the end of 1821 he followed her to Pisa, sending on to his residence, the Casa Lanfranchi, his pets, monkeys, dogs, cats, and peahens. It was at Pisa that he resolved upon the publication of his own paper, " The Liberal," of which four numbers were issued between October, 1822, and June, 1823. To assist him, he obtained the services of Leigh Hunt, who arrived at Byron's house with a wife and six children and no money in his pocket. Shelley was also at Pisa, but shortly after Hunt's arrival was drowned while yachting. (At that time sailing was

the favourite pastime of the English residents.) The burning of Shelley's body on the shore is an incident which has caught the imagination, and lives in the memory of all admirers of the young poet.

Leigh Hunt and his considerable family were quartered on Byron, who made payments to them which were resented, partly because they were considered too meagre and partly by reason of his method of giving them. The arrangement was a failure ; and the paper, " The Liberal," had not won the success which had been hoped for it. Another change of residence, however, came to close this unsatisfactory state of affairs.

The Austrian Government refused to allow the Gambas to remain longer at Pisa, and they and the Countess took up residence at Genoa. Byron followed Teresa in the autumn of 1822, and resided in the Casa Saluzzo, overlooking the bay. There he wrote " The Island," " The Age of Bronze," and continued " Don Juan," but these works do not reach the standard of his earlier inspirations, and his genius is almost at the end of its expression. He was now frail in body. His health was not good, and the contemplation of the future was not without alarm.

To Genoa came Lady Blessington on an eight weeks' visit. She was an Irishwoman of wit and vivacity. At first she was disappointed in Byron, but his great personal charm won her over, and a warm friendship developed between them. Byron told Lady Blessington of his presentiment that he would die in Greece. He was now considering the great journey that was to prove the most noble and creditable part of his life, the work that was to put the seal on his European fame, and which caused his centenary to be celebrated

with greater acclamation by the Greeks and other nations than by his own countrymen.

The departure of Lady Blessington was a great loss to Byron. He found her a responsive friend; and had he met her earlier, it is probable that her influence would have shaped events differently. By the side of the brilliant Irishwoman, the Countess seemed almost uninteresting. He began, at last, to tire of her and felt a desire to cut adrift from the whole of his past life and tread pastures new. He was slow in making up his mind, but the call to throw his help on the side of the Greeks, struggling for independence, came to him; and he cut the chains which bound him and answered the summons.

The last chapter of Byron's life, the one that has caused those with whom he threw in his lot to preserve his memory with praise and gratitude, cannot be passed over in a few words. It must be dealt with fully under its own heading. Byron once said himself that he thought literature was not his true vocation. He was cut out to be a leader of great causes, a soldier engaged in active and hazardous enterprises. When the opportunity came to fulfil this rôle, he grasped it; but the course of his earlier life had now unfitted him to play the part. His natural and apt qualities were prevented from exercising their full play by a wrecked constitution, and by habits that had bound him with bonds, which it was too late to break.

Byron's Genius

In the previous chapter on the life of Byron, the atmosphere in which the poet lived, the circumstances which surrounded him, the handicap of heredity, and the cruelty of his deformity, were described. The object was not to deny the faults and failings of the man, nor to attempt to explain them away. The aim was rather to show the temptations and difficulties with which he had to contend, and to produce a more just view of him than that which is usually held by the majority of his countrymen. This is necessary before the impression created by his private life can be placed wholly on one side, leaving the ground clear for an unprejudiced consideration of his undoubted genius.

In reviewing a figure of Lord Byron's greatness, posterity is not concerned with his personal acts, but rather with the beauty, power, and merit of his work. His influence on the literature of the century and the effect of the expression of his genius are things apart from an opinion on his morals, and should not be confused nor depreciated by them. It is important to re-emphasise this point, because critics have allowed their vision to be clouded, and are biassed, some of them unconsciously, against him.

English disparagement of Byron owes something again to the poet's frank, and sometimes bitter, criticism of his country. This was largely due to his unfortunate experiences. He was an exile, an outcast

from his social order ; and it was not surprising that these things rankled in his mind.

Too much stress must not be laid on his anti-English attacks. It does not affect the question of his genius as a poet and should not be a reason for excluding him from the company of the great men of our race.

Some of his countrymen—but all too few—have been able to pierce the mists of prejudice and see the man of genius behind them. Matthew Arnold very much admired Byron's vigour, force, and passion, and his words are well known :

> What helps it now that Byron bore
> With haughty scorn which mocked the smart,
> From Europe to the Ætolian shore
> The pageant of his bleeding heart,
> And thousands counted every groan,
> And Europe made his woe her own.

We are told that Tennyson, then a boy, felt that the sun had gone out when the dreadful sentence, " Byron is dead," rang through London. Many there were who were equally affected by the tragic news. But to the majority of those who came after, the spectacle of Byron makes little appeal ; and that which irritates and offends them has led them to decry a genius which was elsewhere recognised.

Yet Byron was not all bitterness towards England. " England, with all thy faults I love thee still," he wrote ; while his affection for his ancestral home at Newstead Abbey and his pride in his standing as an English nobleman were always very marked.

If it had been left to Englishmen to measure the genius of Byron, the sound of his voice would long ago have become silent. But Byron still lives. His name is as great as any in Europe. He speaks still to the

struggling and oppressed, and his words are heard as only those of a great man can be. It is this universal, European acclamation, undying and sincere, which proves to Englishmen against their inclination that here was a genius. Proof of genius is contained in just those praises and acts of remembrance which have surrounded the name of the poet one hundred years after his death.

The centenary in 1924 was celebrated at home and abroad with all the pomp and ceremony of a great occasion. Round the statue of Byron in London clustered members of the Greek colony, paying their respects to one who is identified with their history and regarded by them, not only as the Liberator of Greece and Champion of Greek Freedom, but the most celebrated Englishman of the nineteenth century.

It must not be thought that the Continent took Byron to its heart only because he championed the cause of liberty. There were many such in the early part of the nineteenth century who have left no mark on history. It was his poetic genius that won universal admiration. He expressed what men were feeling all the way from Spain to Russia. They realised that he alone was endowed with those great gifts that enabled him to give voice to it, and devoured his words.

Any man who utters sympathy for the down-trodden and oppressed is certain to receive a hearing from those who find themselves in that unfortunate condition. If Byron were remembered only because he espoused the cause of the weak, it would not necessarily be a proof of genius. His European reputation was not, however, confined within those limits. It was universal. It is this very universality that is not appreci-

ated by his English critics, a universality which they affect to ignore because they do not understand it. Byron was acclaimed by all, by the free, just as loudly as by the oppressed. There must necessarily have been something more than creditable sentiments to account for it. That something was a literary genius, which is unique, extraordinary, and impossible of comparison with contemporaries and predecessors, because there was never anything quite like it.

To support this contention the most convincing proofs are found in expressions of opinion by other great literary men of his century. They, at least, were free from the prejudice of the unenlightened critics, and their judgment is worth having. It will be admitted that the words of Goethe carry weight. A genius himself, he was competent to appraise the worth of another. He eulogised Byron thus :

> " A character of such eminence has never existed before, and probably will never come again. The beauty of ' Cain ' is such as we shall not see a second time in the world. Byron issues from the sea waves, ever fresh. He is undoubtedly the greatest genius of our century. The English may think of him as they please ; this is certain, they can show no poet who is comparable to him."

There is nothing doubting nor half-hearted about this praise of Goethe's. It rings true, and it is true. His admiration was not isolated. A search of European literature reveals countless examples of the same unstinted approbation. Byron had many imitators and followers. Only a genius can have them. Some of his admirers bear great names. Victor Hugo was among them with other Frenchmen like Lamartine

and Alfred de Musset. The influence of Byron on Muller and Heine, among Goethe's compatriots, is not disputed. Leopardi and Giusti, poets of Italy, and Pushkin of Russia acknowledged the debt which literature owed him. The list could be greatly lengthened to prove the extent of the world's tribute.

In the face of such evidence it seems absurd to belittle the powers of Byron or suggest that they do not exist. The mass of competent opinion acclaiming him renders such efforts futile. To refuse him a place at all among the poets, as many of his countrymen do, merely shows how far prejudice can in some cases warp judgment.

Europe made Byron its own poet. He became cosmopolitan. Many at home have little idea to what an extent this is a fact. A mere recital of the various translations of his works will help to give a clearer picture. As they came out, they were translated speedily into French, German, Italian, and Russian. "The Bride of Abydos" was produced in ten different languages; "Cain" in nine. To take one example, "Manfred," and recount the various translations is an eye-opener to many. There are, according to the "Encyclopædia Britannica," one Bohemian, two Danish, two Dutch, nine German, three Hungarian, three Italian, two Polish, one Romaic, four Russian, three Spanish, and one Rumanian.

To the astonished "Why?" of the blinded Englishman, who cannot see the greatness of Byron, the answer has already been given: Byron was a genius. It does not follow, of course, that a man would make so wide and strong an appeal merely because he happened to be a genius, although, conversely, it is true that without being a genius it would be impossible.

There are good reasons why the genius of Byron fired the imagination of Europe.

One of these reasons has already been touched upon: Byron was the champion of liberty. He was moved by the evil lot of the oppressed. He was the avowed enemy of tyranny and despotism. He knew how to frame his plea for the wronged. When he spoke, he spoke directly. A good example is "The Prophecy of Dante," in which he was addressing the whole Italian nation. He has been aptly described as the Poet of the Revolution, and for the first half of the nineteenth century he held a position in the minds of men which was shared only by Napoleon.

Byron stood for liberty of action and freedom of thought. The struggling nations of the Europe of his day, who were fighting for liberty, hung upon his words. He attacked arrogance and hypocrisy with stout blows. He pleaded for justice and freedom. His enemies have charged him with insincerity. They pretend that his chivalry and nobility were not truly prompted by the heart, but were the outcome of bitterness engendered by his exile and expulsion from his order. A study of his lines proves the contrary. Sincerity and conviction shine through them. Insincerity and pretence could never have stirred men as Byron did. He really and passionately loved freedom. In that matter no one can question his sincerity, since he gave his life for his ideal.

In addition to Byron's championship of the weak, there were other reasons why he became the poet of Europe. Many of the things to which his English critics take objections, things which prevent them from forming an impartial opinion of his work, neither offended nor biassed his foreign readers. In some of

them they even saw a certain strength and fascination, as opposed to the dislike and irritation of his English audience. Among such were his egotism, his remarks about women, his contempt for propriety, and his somewhat theatrical manner. These appealed to the nations of Europe, increasing, instead of clouding, his reputation.

Further, Byron lost little by translation into the various tongues. He was as easy to read in Russian as in Spanish, in Rumanian as in German. He was himself a cosmopolitan. He lived on the Continent and described the scenes and types with which his continental readers were familiar. His settings were European. His heroes travelled in the Rhine country, through Spain and Italy, and in the East. He created characters which lived in the mind of the Teuton and the Slav. The Latins could recognise them, and they understood him.

For these reasons, which have been briefly stated, Byron was enthroned by Europe. Only England refused homage. But, it is argued, he did nothing for England. He criticised and abused her. He offended her susceptibilities and annoyed her conservatism. There is truth in it, but there is another side to the picture. It should not be forgotten that, in the words of Mazzini, " Byron made English literature European." He did another service. He brought a wealth of knowledge to his countrymen about foreign lands, and he brought it at a time when the channels of such knowledge were few. As books of travel alone the works of Byron are of great value. His " Childe Harold " is the finest poem in this respect in the language, and the stimulus it gave to foreign travel would be difficult to exaggerate.

In summarising on the paradox of Byron's fame, it may be said that he was the poet of the bourgeois. That was his aim. He meant to make himself their spokesman, and he succeeded. He was a born poet, and the divine gift of poetry converted in some degree his hereditary impetuosity into an elevating and ennobling instrument. He is melodramatic, sentimental, and mysterious. They were influences of the literature of the revolutionary period; and while they made no lasting appeal in England, they endeared him to the European nations and account for the permanence of his fame.

The foregoing remarks have had the object of proving that the genius of Byron really existed. The arguments have been based on the universality and lasting qualities of his reputation, the sincere enthusiasm and affection for him among different races, and the eulogy of great men in the world of European literature who did not confine their praise to words, but imitated and followed him. It was necessary to establish the fact of his genius, because so many of his countrymen deny it altogether. It must now be clear that denial is impossible; and the next step is to examine its leading features.

An attempt to compare the genius of Byron with that of any of his contemporaries is courting failure, for it can lead to no conclusion. To place it beside the acknowledged gifts of Wordsworth, Keats, Shelley, or Coleridge, and endeavour to appraise his worth by this means, results in confusion of judgment. It cannot be compared. It is something completely and entirely different, something in a class by itself, isolated, individual. His source of inspiration lies in his own extraordinary personality. He is not imaginative,

but rather descriptive. He does not wander into the realms of fancy as other poets do. He does not create a variety of types. His heroes are moulded on the same lines, and it must be confessed that there is a certain monotony about them. The personality of Byron can be traced in all of them, and they resemble musical variations on a set theme. But if the type is the same, the description is masterly. His descriptions always were, whether they were of persons or places. In this way he made up for a certain lack of imagination.

But it is not possible to put one's finger on the real truth of the power of Byron's genius by following the usual lines of poetical criticism and analysis. It is not enough to say that he could describe what he had seen with a picturesqueness which was not excelled —not enough to extol his energy, his warmth of passion, his forcefulness. It is necessary to look elsewhere for the secret of his success, and it is found in his oratory and his satire. It is as an orator and a satirist that Byron is dominant.

"Childe Harold," "Manfred," and "Cain," all display the orator at work. They are poems, but they are more than that. They are long addresses to his international audience. "The Prophecy of Dante" was a plea for broken Italy, dismembered by the Austrians. "The Age of Bronze" in its oratorical fervour probably inspired Victor Hugo's "Légende des Siècles"; and even "Don Juan" enters largely upon the political arena.

Byron spoke, and the nations of the world listened. Struggling Greece, enslaved Italy, captive Poland, and discontented Ireland, were moved. Even beyond Europe his call rang out. The rising States of South America heard it.

Byron's genius as a poetic orator is undisputed. He had all the requisites of the Poet of Freedom. He could frame his appeal in a manner that was irresistible, and was eloquent and convincing. He could play upon the emotional string, draw his lesson from history, and stir men to action. His words were an inspiration, an incitement to strike a blow against tyranny and injustice.

> Hereditary bondsmen!
> Know ye not, who would be free,
> Themselves must strike the blow.

What wonder that such sentences as this endeared him to the struggling people!

> Yet Freedom! Yet thy banner torn and flying
> Streams like the thunderstorm against the wind.

He combined the high oratorical talents—eloquence and ridicule, elegy and incitement, emotional description, historical appeal, and broad effects, all expressed in such striking lines as:

> A thousand years scarce serve to form a State,
> An hour may lay it in the dust.

Byron's oratory rallied the faint-hearted, sick with disappointment at long-deferred hope and overwhelmed by the seeming impossibility of their task. Why was he able to do it? No other poet has attained a power comparable to his. The secret is that Byron had within him the making of a great statesman. He possessed all the qualities of leadership and might have become a brilliant leader had not circumstances been against him. His lameness, his upbringing, his isolation, all prevented it. But the possibility was still there, and it found expression in resounding verse. When he did embark upon active participation in revolt, it was too late. His health had gone; his life had unfitted him for the task, and he collapsed

beneath the strain. But his work was done, for he had paved the way and was the inspiration of more than the Grecian movement towards the cherished goal of freedom and independence.

The orator of freedom is, then, one side of the genius of Byron, and the side that won for him his international reputation. The other side is satire. Byron as the satirist is most clearly seen in "Don Juan," the greatest of all his works. It appealed more to the European than to the Englishman, though its brilliance can be denied by none, for it has scarcely been surpassed.

Byron satirised every phase of life. He mocked at all and sundry. His wit was easy, and his style was light. At times he enchanted, sometimes he offended. He could be scathing, and he could ridicule. Little escaped him, and his cynicism descended to extremes. He laughed at respectability and convention, challenged hypocrisy; and yet there was a charm in the way he did it which made him easily forgiven. He mixed his satire with a strength and beauty that could soothe and palliate.

His humour was keen and versatile. He could rise to heights of comedy. In the "Irish Avatar" he provides a feast of fun, which would amuse in any age. He bears some resemblance to Voltaire, but his humour is richer and more brilliant.

Satire and oratory are the pillars of the genius of Byron, a genius real and powerful, but not sufficiently recognised in his own country. It is so different, so unique, that it cannot be measured by ordinary standards. Comparison with other poets leads the critic nowhere. Byron stands alone, one of the very few Englishmen of letters who have become universal.

There are not wanting modern critics who cast doubt upon the sanity of Byron. It will be remembered that his wife attempted to arrange the separation on that plea. Medical evidence at the time proved such charges to be totally unfounded. It is true that he inherited peculiarities and eccentricities, and that he possessed a neurotic temperament. It is also true that he sometimes drank to excess, though this failing has been greatly exaggerated. But his brain was sound. He was not at all irresponsible, and his actions were not due to deficiencies in his mental equipment. He was extreme in his passion for an idea, and he was ready to make sacrifices, however great, in a cause. For Liberty he gave his money and time freely. He was brave and a fighter, strong in his determination, uncompromising in his attitude. There was no insanity in this, but an exceptional strength of conviction, and the power to give voice to it. On the moral side the plea of insanity cannot be urged with any more success. He was handicapped by heredity and circumstances, and his own moments of disgust and revolt prove that his vision was clear and that he could see immorality in all its hideousness. Byron, indeed, was theatrical and eccentric, but he possessed fully all his mental faculties, and was wholly responsible for his actions.

It is surely possible in these days for Englishmen to form a straightforward, honest opinion of Byron. It is time that the position which he occupies in the literature of the world was recognised. We are not concerned in this century with the great Byron controversy, which agitated Society in the days of the Regency, and which played so large a part in relegating the poet to the background. That matter is dead.

It has ceased to be interesting and exciting. On his private morals, too, the present generation is capable of taking a broader and saner view, and need not be over-shocked as was Victorian prudery. It is possible to pass over his faults without condoning them, and not permit them to obscure the gifts of an exceptional man. Further, the bitter attacks of the poet on leading Englishmen need not annoy us at this length of time ; and his Liberalism, revolutionary though it was, does not ruffle an old Conservatism which has now become out-of-date. All these factors combined in the early part of Queen Victoria's reign against the preservation of Byron's memory, and excluded him from a place among the brilliant sons of England.

With the removal of these influences working against the immortality of Byron, it might be thought that full and generous recognition would be given to him at last. Among the numerous articles and reminiscences, which appeared on the occasion of the centenary, there were, however, still traces of the old prejudices and a persistent refusal to accept the lofty throne which all the other nations of Europe awarded him. It is regrettable, for the number of Englishmen who have won universal admiration in the realm of literature are few enough. Milton, for example, holds a place at home to which Byron could never approach. Yet Milton abroad is unappreciated, while Byron is worshipped. All Byron's contemporaries, Shelley, Keats, Scott, Wordsworth, and Coleridge, are given pride of place by the English, but the European nations have little knowledge of any of them. Goethe, the outstanding world genius of that age, extolled Byron above them all. He merely expressed what was generally thought. Byron's

portrait was everywhere. Byron's voice echoed throughout a dozen nations. Byron's influence was stronger and more far-reaching than any.

A critical study of Byron's poetry must be left for discussion in another chapter. Here his genius alone has been dealt with, a genius which revolutionised the whole aspect and position of English literature among the nations of the world, and profoundly affected the works of other men of letters, French, German, Italian, and others, who came after him. The revival of Russian and Polish literature dates from Byron. He influenced Heine and Leopardi, while the romance writers of France and Italy felt that he was the highest expression of what a Poet of Freedom should be. Few, in fact, of the continental writers were outside or independent of Byron's influence.

"Byron," says Taine, "is so great and so English that from him alone we shall learn more truths of his country and age than from all the rest together."

Matthew Arnold says: "Along with his astounding power and passion, he had a strong and deep sense for what is beautiful in Nature and for what is beautiful in human action and suffering. When he warms to his work, when he is inspired, Nature herself seems to take the pen from him as she took it from Wordsworth, though in a different fashion, with her own penetrating simplicity."

Byron lived through a time of crisis, one of the gravest periods of the world's history, when the nations were fighting for freedom, and all Europe was engaged in the Napoleonic struggle. The poet found in it his inspiring force, for he alone among men of letters embodied the facts in his works, and achieved distinction as the Poet of Freedom.

Byron's Poetry

To assign to Byron's poetry its rightful place in the realm of literature, his work must be judged apart from all considerations of the man and his life. The previous chapter was devoted to an endeavour to show that Byron was a man of genius, and the argument was based on the fact of the universal admiration and esteem which he won despite English disparagement and refusal to recognise him. It is now possible to consider the mode of expression which the genius of Byron chose, and appraise the merits and demerits of his poetry.

The over-eager attempts made by admirers of Byron's work to justify his life and actions are unnecessary if attention be concentrated on the beauty of his verse. The object of giving explanations of his conduct at all, of describing the influences by which he was surrounded, was to remove the idea, tenaciously held by some critics, that real poetry could never emanate from one of his failings. If this prejudice can be sufficiently overcome to allow an impartial consideration of his poems from a purely literary point of view, the object has been gained and the path cleared for adjudging his real worth as a poet.

It is a common practice to take some of Byron's poems and compare them with those of the shining lights among his contemporaries. To place extracts from his works beside the most beautiful passages from Keats, Wordsworth, Shelley, and Coleridge is obviously

a very severe test. The age was as rich in poets as any in the history of English literature, and even some of those termed minor poets can show lines which challenge the best in Byron. But to do this is to take quite the wrong course in estimating the originality, power, influence, and value of Byron's works. It brings only misleading conclusions.

The reason is that Byron holds a position which is unique. He cannot safely be compared with any of those whose names have been mentioned. He was in a class by himself. He was prompted by different motives, swayed by different influences, and inspired by different causes.

Byron was not an English poet moved by the beautiful in Nature and singing a song on an ethereal theme. He was not a man carried away by the force of a wonderful and soaring imagination. He was not one who found the impulse to create so insistent that he strayed into the realms of fancy and gloried in a wealth of vision. Byron was a European poet, a universal poet, stirred by the inequalities and injustices which he saw before his eyes, and impelled to express the political trend of thought towards freedom and independence which absorbed the minds of men in the times in which he lived.

Although he did not tread the paths which the other poets of his epoch followed, he was none the less a poet for that reason. It must be remembered that no poet of his time achieved the same amount of popularity with the exception of Goethe. That great man described Byron as "the greatest genius of his century," and said that "the beauty of 'Cain' is such as we shall not see a second time in the world." It is also instructive to quote the opinion of Matthew

Arnold, who wrote : " When the year 1900 is turned and our nation comes to recount the poetic glories in the century which has then just ended, her first names with her will be those of Byron and Wordsworth." It is true that this prophecy has not been fulfilled, but it illustrates, nevertheless, the opinion of a great mind on the standing of Byron as a poet.

That the appreciation of such great men as these has not been generally echoed by the bulk of our nation is due to a failure to understand Byron's unique position. He was different ; and the English people have realised that there was a difference without being able to explain it. Morley makes the matter clear when he writes of Byron as the poet of the revolution.

It is a most extraordinary fact that England should have produced the man who became the inspiration for " conspirators and socialists in Europe for half a century." Revolutionary thought was sweeping the Continent. Liberty's clarion call resounded through the nations. The one land where it was almost unheard was England. England's Conservatism was unshaken ; and yet it was a member of her own aristocracy who brought the message of freedom to many a troubled heart.

To over-estimate the influence of Byron on the political thought of the early nineteenth century is not easy. Mazzini wrote : " The day will come when Democracy will remember all it owes to Byron." It was a true saying. Peoples, who have since won their independence, celebrated Byron's centenary as commemorating one of the leading figures of history. They believed that they were doing so, and criticisms of the inadequate display of English enthusiasm were heard in many foreign circles.

As a poet of the revolution Byron holds a position which cannot be appreciated by mistaken comparisons. It was his wish to make himself what he became, and he was well equipped by Nature for the task. In discussing the question of his genius emphasis was laid on his gift of oratory. It was one of the most striking things about him. There was a force and splendour behind it that drove his message home. It was direct and lacked neither sincerity nor audacity.

There are some who declare that Byron did not really feel what he wrote, that his utterances were prompted by personal bitterness rather than real enthusiasm for the cause he supported. It is difficult to see how such an assertion can be maintained in the face of known facts. He did not confine himself to wordy exhortations. His actions supported them. He made extensive contributions in money to the societies who fought for liberty. He sacrificed much of his time to aid them, and gave ungrudgingly. When engaged in the plot with the Gambas at Ravenna, he did not hesitate to run personal risks; and in the end he laid down his life in the cause of the Greeks. Accusations of insincerity cannot, therefore, be proved against him. His various references to liberty gave him his unique position as a Poet of Freedom, and one quotation may be given to illustrate this great characteristic of Byron's poetry, which endeared him to a world fighting against tyranny.

ISRAEL BERTUCCIO: We must forget all feelings save the one,
We must resign all passions save our purpose,
We must behold no object save our country,
And only look on death as beautiful,
So that the sacrifice ascend to heaven,
And draw down freedom on her evermore.

CALENDARO: But if we fail——

BERTUCCIO: They never fail who die
In a great cause; the block may soak their gore;
Their heads may sodden in the sun; their limbs
Be strung to city gates and castle walls—
But still their spirit walks abroad. Though years
Elapse, and others share as dark a doom,
They but augment the deep and sweeping thoughts
Which overpower all others, and conduct
The world at last to freedom.

Marino Faliero, II, 2.

Such passages show the zeal which consumed the man for a good and noble cause, and help one to understand how it was that he exerted so profound an influence. He preferred always something real and actual. He was at his best upon some social theme. He could not soar away from earth like Shelley and glory in the surpassing beautiful. A comparison of "Marino Faliero" with "Manfred" will reveal how Byron was more successful in handling what passed before his eyes than in the exercise of the imagination.

As champion of the revolution, Byron was a political poet first and foremost. In this he joins the company of Shakespeare and Milton, to whom political themes made so great an appeal. It was Byron who focussed the attention of Europeans on Shakespeare and extended his audience. Our greatest genius would not have won so commanding a world position had not Byron directed the Continental nations to a study of English literature. In short, he popularised English poetry on the Continent.

In a general consideration of Byron's poetry, his position as the spokesman of European revolutionary

sentiment must be kept strongly in mind. It explains much that is otherwise difficult to understand. It gives the reason for his universal popularity and the high esteem and affection in which he is held. It shows why England has not taken him to her heart, but has rather given reasons for not doing so by wandering into by-paths and discussing questions of morality and personal failings. It explains why it is not possible to form opinions on the quality of his work by comparison with the poetry of men who are very definitely poets of England and drew their inspiration from sources which are altogether different.

In the poetry of Byron there is nobility and chivalry. They are strangely mixed with descents to voluptuousness. In the one case he is actuated by his passion for right, and in the other he succumbs to the influences by which he was constantly overshadowed—the loose morals of his order, the handicap of heredity, and the unfortunate circumstances of his upbringing. The voluptuousness cannot be allowed to detract from what is great and beautiful in his work. The harm of it is much over-emphasised, and a great deal of modern literature is more pernicious in its effect upon general behaviour.

Byron had the advantage of a direct and clear style. It stood him in good stead in his work of propaganda and insisted upon a respectful hearing. He was extremely easy to read, and this ease was not confined to his own tongue, but remained when the translations were made into the many European languages. As an orator he was supreme; and we have seen that his gift of rhetoric was one of the outstanding features of his genius.

In descriptions Byron excelled. They were, how-

ever, descriptions of objects and scenes with which he was familiar. He could word-paint what was before his eyes in a manner that was masterly, but he was less successful when he was drawing upon his imagination. His journeys over Europe provided him with the settings for his poems, and the reproduction of what he had seen was brilliant. So faithful and true were they that they brought Englishmen knowledge which was new and educative, describing in sweeping, arresting style the scenery and customs of lands with which the majority were unfamiliar. Byron taught his public, widened their outlook, aroused in them a desire to travel, and acted as a competent guide to those who would explore other countries. Although he had a preference for foreign stages, he could describe scenes in England with the same power of conjuring up an exact picture to the eye. Those places for which he had a sentimental attachment inspired some of his most beautiful lines. The most noteworthy example was the ancestral home of Newstead, in the heart of the Sherwood Forest in Nottinghamshire. Byron had an intense love for it, and no historic house has ever been described with the fidelity and charm of the lines on Newstead Abbey in his "Elegy" and "Don Juan."

Pressed by his creditors, Byron sold the Abbey to his friend, Colonel Wildman, and the loss embittered his life:

Newstead! what saddening change of scene is thine!
Thy yawning arch betokens slow decay;
The last and youngest of a noble line
Now holds thy mouldering turrets in his sway.

Deserted now, he scans thy gray worn towers;
Thy vaults, where dead of feudal ages sleep;
Thy cloisters, pervious to the wintry showers;
These, these he views, and views them but to weep.

Elegy on Newstead Abbey.

The title of Abbey is scarcely accurate. Founded by Henry II in 1170, it was strictly a Priory of the Order of Austin Canons. At the Dissolution, it was given to " Little John Byron of the great beard." Of the monastic chapel practically only the west front now remains (of beautiful thirteenth century design). The central doorway shows a fine figure of " majesty," and high up in the gable is a delightfully-executed " Madonna."

Constantly on the verge of having to dispose of Newstead to appease his clamorous creditors, Byron held off the evil day again and again. An intense pride in his ancestral home, joined with an equally intense love of its natural beauties, withheld him from this sacrifice.

> It was a vast and venerable pile;
> So old it seemed only not to fall,
> Yet strength was pillar'd in each massy aisle;
> *Childe Harold.*

> It stood embosom'd in a happy valley,
> Crown'd by high woodlands, where the Druid oak
> Stood, like Caractacus in act to rally
> His host, with broad arms 'gainst the thunderstroke.
> And from beneath his boughs were seen to sally
> The dappled foresters; as day awoke,
> The branching stag swept down with all his herd,
> To quaff a brook which murmur'd like a bird.
>
> Before the mansion lay a lucid lake,
> Broad as transparent, deep, and freshly fed
> By a river, which its soften'd way did take
> In currents through the calmer water spread
> Around: the wildfowl nestled in the brake
> And sedges, brooding in their liquid bed:
> The woods sloped downwards to its brink, and stood
> With their green faces fix'd upon the flood.
> *Don Juan.*

It was quite impossible for Byron to keep up the glories of his ancestral estate, and it added to his bitterness to see the steady decay of the splendid mansion.

Newstead throughout its history seems to have had financial troubles—even in the early days of the abbots. Byron visaged clearly his eventual dispossession, and, as one writer puts it, " the recollection of it steals through his poetry like the wail of an æolian harp."

> Amidst the court a Gothic fountain play'd
> Symmetrical, but deck'd with carvings quaint—
> Strange faces, like to men in masquerade,
> And here perhaps a monster, there a saint ;
> The spring gush'd through grim mouths of granite made
> And sparkled into basins, where it spent
> Its little torrent in a thousand bubbles,
> Like man's vain glory, and his vainer troubles.
>
> *Don Juan.*

Mr. Compton-Rickett says : " Whatever view we British people may hold of Byron's work, there can be no doubt that on the Continent he was in his own day, and still is in ours, one of the greatest figures in English literature. There is no other poet in the Romantic Revival who touched Europe so unmistakeably as Byron."

Lord Macaulay said : " Mr. Murray paid at different times for copyrights of his lordship's poems certainly over £15,000. Never had any writer so vast a command of the whole eloquence of scorn, misanthropy and despair. Never was there such variety in monotony and bitterness as that of Byron. Moreover, there was created in the minds of his enthusiasts a pernicious and absurd association between intellectual and moral

depravity; from his poetry they drew a system of ethics compounded of misanthropy and voluptuousness."

Byron had a wonderful power of vividly describing incidents, situations, and places he had seen, and making his readers feel and see them too. He was one of the most widely-travelled of our poets and painted poetic pictures of real power and beauty. It was this gift of vivid description that appealed to M. Taine, who said: "Alone among the English poets, his contemporaries, Byron gets to the top of the poetic mountain."

Sir Walter Scott also said: "Byron has embraced every topic of human life and sounded every string on the divine harp, from its slightest to its most powerful and heart-astounding tones."

The following quotation from the "Bride of Abydos" illustrates his descriptive gift:

Know ye the land where the cypress and myrtle
  Are emblems of deeds that are done in their clime?
Where the rage of the vulture, the love of the turtle,
  Now melt into sorrow, now madden to crime?
Know ye the land of the cedar and vine,
Where the flowers ever blossom, the beams ever shine;
Where the light wings of Zephyr, oppress'd with perfume,
Wax faint o'er the gardens of Gúl in her bloom;
Where the citron and olive are fairest of fruit,
And the voice of the nightingale never is mute;
Where the tints of the earth, and the hues of the sky,
In colours though varied, in beauty may vie,
And the purple of Ocean is deepest in die;
Where the virgins are soft as the roses they twine,
And all, save the spirit of man, is divine?
'Tis the clime of the east; 'tis the land of the Sun—
Can he smile on such deeds as his children have done?
Oh! wild as the accents of lovers' farewell
Are the hearts which they bear, and the tales which they
  tell.

Combined with this great gift for poetical description of locality, Byron was able to create characters which were true to type. These he used in telling fashion to mould opinion, in pursuit of the great aims of the movements with which he associated himself. It is said of him that there was a sameness about all his heroes, and that in " Childe Harold," " Lara," " Manfred," and " Don Juan," he was presenting variations of the same personality, which was really himself in disguise. Even if that be true, they appear real enough and carry conviction and hold the interest. The power of creation must be allowed him, as well as the ability to draw character with bold and well-defined strokes.

Byron was a penetrating critic. He had a keen insight into life and manners. He was severe and unsparing, and cynicism was often present. The latter was due to his own unhappy experiences and to the fact that he did not possess the faculty of burying the evil past in oblivion. At the same time he was not insensible to the beauties of domestic life, as the words of Faliero to Angiolina, before he went to the meeting of the conspirators, testify. But this mood was not lasting, and the passage to anti-social and licentious thoughts, such as appear in " Don Juan," was swift.

He possessed an inexhaustible fund of wit and brilliant satirical gifts. His verse satire is a branch in which he excelled and probably reached greater heights than anyone with the exception of Shakespeare. A study of his letters reveal his humour, and " The Vision of Judgment " and " Don Juan " are the best of comedy.

Of Byron as a poet it may be said, then, that he possessed a vivid, easy oratorical style ; that he was

moved to protest against tyranny and to encourage the struggling and oppressed; that he voiced many high and noble sentiments which the voluptuous passages cannot obscure; that he possessed a remarkable power of description, not of imaginary, but of actual, scenes; that he could create true characters and types; that he had a keen critical insight into life, and, further, that he excelled as a satirist, and was one of the greatest masters of the English language. These were the qualities that established him as the most famous Englishman of letters in Europe and earned for him the right of recognition as one of the great poets of England.

To turn to the other side of the picture, some criticisms are made of his poetry which must be admitted to be fair and reasonable. It has already been said that Byron was not a great imaginative poet. He was concerned with the living world of men and hugged the earth closely, never soaring, like others, among the clouds. Goethe said: "When Byron reflects he is a child." Keats affirmed that he was "too much engaged by the common husks and temporalities of things." These observations are fair and true. Byron was not happy when relying upon his imagination. He was concerned with reality, and as the poet of reality won a position that was unique.

Other faults can be pointed out. They arise for the most part from the speed with which he wrote. During the exile he produced the "Prophecy of Dante," "Marino Faliero," "The Two Foscari," "The Vision of Judgment," "Heaven and Earth," "Cain," "Sardanapalus," the beginning of "Don Juan," and others, all within the space of eighteen months. Such rapidity obviously brings its defects; and it is not surprising to

find that construction is often loose and ambiguous, that grammar would have benefited by revision, that rhythm is sometimes lacking in harmony, and that a certain fineness is wanting.

The above are not serious reasons for rejecting Byron's poetry, but others are put forward which have an element of truth and demand greater consideration. It is said, with a certain amount of justification, that behind the sonorous, rhetorical phrases are thoughts which do not rise above the commonplace. It must be admitted that the criticism is a just one. Byron was sometimes content with the superficial and spoke hurriedly ; and the language with which he clothed the idea did not conceal its meanness. As a lyrical poet he did not maintain consistently the high level which he reached in his sonnet, " Chillon." Often he runs along for many lines with charm and beauty, and then suddenly introduces some incongruous passage which breaks the spell. He was constantly being carried away by his lawless emotion and by too keen a consciousness of the black, surging whirlpool of his own troubles and difficulties. But if some of his thoughts deserve this criticism of being commonplace, and if he did cling too closely to concrete realities as opposed to abstract fancies, there is much fine writing in his works. The wonderful stanzas of the " Isles of Greece " are a case in point, and a hundred other passages could be quoted.

The charge of lack of genius is made too often against Byron. It has been shown above that it is unfounded, especially when it throws doubt upon the sincerity of his love for freedom. Here Byron spoke from the heart. He felt what he wrote ; and because he felt it, his lines were inspired. When he dealt with social

matters, it is true, he was sometimes so absorbed in his own case that he mistook the personal for the general. His own woes and griefs engaged him rather than an impartial survey of real conditions and a fair criticism of them. But he did not always make this mistake. His insight was too penetrating to be blurred at all times by the weight of his own sorrow.

It is said, again, that Byron has no message to give to seekers after truth—that he brings no spiritual comfort. It must be remembered that Byron was apart from the other poets. The message he brought was inspiring enough, it was clear and uplifting, but it was a message of a different kind. It was no lesson learned from the beauties of nature, nor from a contemplation of goodness, but a call for justice and freedom, with a vigorous protest against tyranny and oppression.

Much of the adverse criticism on Byron arises from the fact that men look in his works for things they have found in other poets. They do not appreciate that he was unique ; whereas it is only by recognising his isolation, and understanding the feelings which prompted him, that his true greatness can be seen. He was the poet of a cause as no other man has been ; and, as the poet of revolutionary Europe, he had more influence in shaping events than any other man of letters.

In a survey of Byron's works, his early beginnings in the " Hours of Idleness " do not call for much attention and may be passed over. In those which came next, " English Bards and Scotch Reviewers," " Hints from Horace," and the " Waltz," his own personal considerations come prominently to the surface, and critical justice suffers in consequence. It

is after the first European journey that the true Byron comes to light.

The first and second cantos of "Childe Harold" established his fame at a single bound. Murray, his publisher, paid £600 for it, and Byron gave the money to his admirer, Mr. Dallas, being at that time averse to receiving anything for his work. The Spenserian verse was hailed with acclamation. The "Pilgrimage" was something entirely new. Nothing like its bold pictures, its sweeping change of scene, its variety of colour, its wealth of incident had been seen. There is a note of monotonous complaint running through it, but it does not dim the poetry of the softer passages.

> It is the hush of night, and all between
> Thy margin and the mountains, dusk, yet clear,
> Mellow'd and mingling, yet distinctly seen,
> Save darken'd Jura, whose capped heights appear
> Precipitously steep; and drawing near,
> There breathes a living fragrance from the shore,
> Of flowers yet fresh with childhood; on the ear
> Drops the light drip of the suspended oar,
> Or chirps the grasshopper one good-night carol more.

This is a very much admired passage; and there are many such possessing a beauty, which raised him to the heights of success and fame. Moore tells of Byron's table being strewn with letters from statesmen, great ladies, and unknown admirers. Nothing like "Childe Harold" had been known.

It must be admitted that Byron never really mastered the metrical art peculiar to the Spenserian form of stanza, which he employed in this poem; but in spite of this defect, the work became famous, describing as it does the poet's own travels, depicting a character which seems to be real, and telling a life story in a

novel way. The descriptions of Venice may be set beside the masterpieces of Ruskin's prose, for they are together the joint pride of Italy and England.

The third and fourth cantos place Byron higher still, for in these he showed a wide knowledge of life and a close study of Nature. No familiarity can detract from "Waterloo," which holds its own with the best in English literature. Sir Walter Scott, referring to it, said he doubted whether any verses in English surpass them in vigour.

"Childe Harold" is not only a fine travel poem, but a scenic panorama. Historically, it had a vast effect in broadening and enriching the sense of the English people. Another reason for the poem's immediate success was the deadly conflict then going on with Napoleon. Byron alone among the poets of that day dealt with the tragic situation which occupied the mind of Europe.

Byron wrote several wild romantic tales in the form of Oriental narrative poems—"The Giaour," "The Bride of Abydos," "The Corsair," "Lara," and "Corinth." They roused the enthusiasm of the public to greater heights. The sales were a delight to his publisher, and 14,000 copies of "The Corsair" were sold in one day. They are written with brilliance and power and are interesting and educative. Byron was prompted by a sincere desire to give pleasure, and he gave it. He became the idol of the reading public, and the lure of his poetry lasted for many a decade.

To the tales must be added "Parisina," "Mazeppa," and "The Island," written with the same ease and rapidity and showing the same broadness of vision and wide range of activity. These lead to "Manfred," which appeared during the exile.

In "Manfred," Byron wrote in blank verse and reached his highest flight in this form of poetry. The beauty of some of his lines bears comparison with the best in English literature.

> "I hear
> Your voices, sweet and melancholy sounds,
> As music on the waters; and I see
> The steady aspect of a clear large star."

It is a fine work, and on its first appearance was hailed as sublime. It makes it impossible to deny Byron a place among the great. Professor Saintsbury says: "Byron imported into English poetry a vast and valuable stock of new imagery, new properties, new scenery and decoration, and his lyrics showed force and fire and great sweetness as well."

With his wonderful versatility Byron attempted other forms. His dramatic poems display great gifts of invention. They were not intended to be acted as stage plays, but they are dramatic inspirations none the less. We have already remarked that Goethe thought the beauty of "Cain" was such as would not be seen again in the world.

Byron's fame rests mainly on his great masterpiece, "Don Juan," one of the most wonderful and original epics in all literature, with its strange mixture of voluptuousness and keen criticism, its mocking tone and underlying seriousness. It combines wit, pathos, indignation, and social satire. He developed it in the sixteen cantos of verse which occupied him for five years; and though unfinished—it never could have been finished—it is a thing of supreme genius. It may not be everybody's book, but it has certainly never done the same harm as the morbid and poisonous

sex novels which pollute the mind and debase the morals of modern England.

Probably Byron enjoyed the writing of "Don Juan" more than that of any other poem he produced. It became a part of his life. It is not founded on any plan, but as a whole gave scope to the wide range of his great natural powers. Of all his poems it is the one most expressive of his real nature; and Trelawny said: "In company, Byron talked in Don Juan's vein." Its plot is the story of a dissipated but amusing man and his life; and is often cynical and revolting, sometimes low and vulgar, but always brilliant, containing many passages of exquisite poetry.

In one or two works only, notably "The Vision of Judgment," did Byron approach the supreme skill and wonderful handling which he displayed in "Don Juan." For spontaneity and completeness he wrote little to compare with it. It shows his inventive genius at its best and touches the extremes of originality.

The poem is Byron's note-book. It is "the pageant of a bleeding heart." He wrote it to suggest an apology for himself. It is a keen criticism of life and English society, in which he avenged himself upon his enemies, both personal and political.

The mockery of "Don Juan" is alternated with interludes of great beauty and strength, but he ever returns to the attack and lashes about him with the whip of ridicule. On the moral question it is difficult to defend the poem, as it is plainly sensuous in parts, and was condemned by the early Victorians. The strictness of that period caused a veil to be drawn over the licentiousness which had paraded unmasked during the Regency. This screen hid Byron also, and was

one of the reasons why the great popularity of his works as a whole declined in England and why he did not maintain among his countrymen the position he had won on the Continent. But despite these influences, "Don Juan" lived and even increased in reputation. There was too much that was fine and brilliant, too much that was dexterous and masterly, to allow it to be obscured and its author forgotten.

Such is Byron the poet. He cannot be compared with other poets of his age, or with those who came before and after him. The ordinary methods of critical analysis cannot be applied to him. His works cannot be approached with preconceived ideas, nor can they be searched for the beauties of thought and expression which are found in the inspired writings of other geniuses. Byron was different. He holds a position not occupied by any other man, and for this reason some English critics affirm that he was no poet at all. Such a conclusion is false and wrong.

Byron was a poet, but not a poet of imaginative flights, not one who soared above the earth in realms of light and vagrant fancy. Byron was a poet of action. He took realities for his themes, played upon them in mocking tones, and pictured them with such fidelity and power that he was awarded the premier position as the descriptive poet of Europe.

Byron at his best was an orator. His poems are stirring addresses to the peoples of Europe. Behind them can be seen the potential statesman, general, or leader in a noble cause. His passionate love of right and freedom and justice shine like a beacon light through all his verse; and his hatred of cruel tyranny so rang in men's hearts that it moved them inevitably to action. How many enterprises owed their inspira-

tion to Byron will never be known, but Democracy had at that time a true prophet, and one who is honoured by the free in lands where cruel oppression once reigned.

Byron, the English aristocrat, exiled from his land, at war with his class, cast off the insular prejudice of his race, shed the clinging conservatism of his peers, and became the poet of revolutionary Europe. He was a real poet, a genius, and a master of English, with a nobility and chivalry, a power of rhetorical and musical language, a faculty for creation and representation, and an unending stream of wit and humour, which have few rivals. Faults and failings he had, but they cannot in justice deprive him of a recognition which he enjoys in all the lands of Europe except the one of which he was a son.

On 2nd April 1821 Archbishop Germanos, head of the "Hetæria" in the Morea, raised the standard of the Cross at Kalavryta and called on the Greeks to rebel against the domination of the Turk. Thus began what is known as the Greek War of Independence, which threw off the rule of the Sultan, that had lasted for four hundred years, and established Greece as an independent kingdom.

Although the Greeks had given signs enough of the impending rebellion, the Turks were caught wholly unprepared, and great success attended the first phase of the campaign. The rising spread rapidly, and the whole of the Morea was won. Fought in Greece and the narrow seas surrounding it, sea power was a decisive factor in the struggle. In this branch the Greeks excelled and had supplied the majority of the sailors serving in the Ottoman Fleet. With the loss of their experienced seamen and the fall of most of their maritime towns in the Greek Archipelago, the Turkish admirals were placed at an enormous disadvantage. They were compelled to rely on raw recruits, and were outclassed by the efficient Greeks, operating from their bases.

Holding to their advantage on the sea, and reinforced by sympathisers in Europe, the first three years of the campaign, 1821 to 1824, saw the Greeks triumphant. Unfortunately, ultimate victory was jeopardised by serious quarrels among themselves, until their

own rivalries and jealousies lost them much of the advantage they had won against the common enemy.

The terrible atrocities committed by the Turks, who massacred men, women, and children wholesale, shocked the civilised world; and Christendom east and west ranged itself on the side of those fighting for their liberty.

In the spring of 1822 the Sultan, now thoroughly alarmed, made determined efforts to crush the rebels. Two strong Turkish armies moved against them. One under Dramali penetrated to the centre of Greece and across the Gulf of Corinth, gaining startling initial successes. By the skill and gallantry of a portion of the Greek forces it was held up and, being cleverly outmanœuvred, was finally annihilated. The other army under Omar Vrioni moved along the western coast, but was brought to a standstill before Missolonghi. A gallant resistance was made, and a surprise attack on the town on 6th January 1823 was beaten off. Omar was compelled on this account to raise the siege.

Dismayed by the course events were taking, the Sultan called with some reluctance upon Mohamet Ali, Pasha of Egypt, a powerful ruler, who threw his well-trained and disciplined army and fleet against the rebels. This extra weight in the scale against them stemmed the tide of Greek success, and the overthrow of their cause seemed inevitable. During this dark period Missolonghi was besieged with vigour, and from May 1825 to April 1826 a magnificent defence was only made possible by the Greek command of the sea. Finally the town fell, and only a small portion of its brave defenders escaped.

It would have gone hardly with Greece had not the European Powers decided on intervention in 1827.

Britain, France, and Russia formed a naval coalition and dispatched a strong allied fleet to Greek waters. The British admiral, Codrington, discovered the Turkish and Egyptian warships in the Bay of Navarino. He attacked them at once and utterly destroyed them. This decisive victory drove the Turks from the Mediterranean and secured for ever the independence of Greece.

European sympathy for Greece took many practical forms ; and in the spring of 1823 the Greek Committee was formed in London with the object of rendering all possible assistance to those who had struck this blow for independence. Byron's friend, Trelawny, wrote to Blaquière, one of the members, suggesting that the poet should be elected a member. This was unanimously agreed upon, and the intelligence greatly pleased Byron. The fight for liberty and independence was one to which the poet had summoned the Greeks in his works. It was one which aroused his passionate enthusiasm ; and his love for the country, begotten by his previous visit, added to his anxiety to help. At once he announced his intention of placing his services at the disposal of the Committee and crossing to Greece to do what lay in his power to help.

At this time Byron was at Genoa and in a state of great indecision regarding his future plans. He had spoken of returning to England, of crossing to America, and of buying a Greek island. He was still entangled with Teresa Guiccioli, though his affection was steadily on the decline. He had obviously tired of her, but her opposition to his proposed Grecian visit caused him to vacillate and delay. His health had become worse, and his tendency to malaria, through residence in the swamps of Venice and Ravenna, had increased.

His constitution was ruined, and he was conscious of the fact that his physical strength was unequal to the tasks he wished to undertake.

At length, however, he put an end to indecision and resolved to go to Greece. From this point Byron emerges as the man of action. Those qualities of energy, judgment, and leadership appear which, had they been given their real chance, would have won for him a place among statesmen of the first rank. Turning with disgust from his past life of libertinism, regretting his wasted years and misused opportunities, he saw that he could yet win honour. That his health would not stand the strain was certain, but he did not turn from the attempt on that account, and was ready to make any sacrifice in the cause which he had so near at heart.

He threw himself into the work of preparation. He summoned Trelawny to his assistance, bought the "Hercules," a brig of 120 tons, for the expedition, collected arms and ammunition and two guns from his yacht, the "Bolivar," with sufficient medical stores to last a thousand men for a year. He provided himself with 10,000 crowns in specie and 40,000 crowns in bills, and took up the question of raising a loan for the insurgents with the Greek Committee in London.

In July 1823 Byron sailed from Genoa to Greece. With him were Trelawny, Gamba, the Countess's brother, Bruno, a young medical student, Fletcher, and several other servants. Returning to effect some repairs, they reached Leghorn, where Mr. Hamilton Browne joined the party. Here Byron received the verses from Goethe, which he acknowledged in a courteous reply. As the voyage continued, Byron shed some of his despondency, and became more

cheerful. The ship passed by Stromboli, and he promised to give a description of the volcano in a new canto of " Childe Harold."

After some discussion, it was decided to make for Argostoli in Cephalonia, where the Governor, Sir J. Napier, was known to sympathise with the Greek cause. The island was sighted on 2nd August, and the harbour entered on the following morning.

Byron had expected to meet in Greece, Blaquière, the member of the Greek Committee in London, who had come to the country to make enquiries and had called upon the poet at Genoa on his outward journey. He was considerably annoyed to find that Blaquière had returned to England without waiting for his arrival. Sir J. Napier was also away, but soon returned, and the party received a warm welcome from the island residents.

Arrived in Cephalonia, Byron found that information from Greece was scanty and unsatisfactory. He despatched messengers to Corfu and Missolonghi for fuller details and resolved to bide his time and not commit himself until he had fuller knowledge of the exact state of affairs. " I won't budge a foot further until I see my way," was his observation on discovering how matters stood. There followed a period of irresolution and inactivity, during which Byron displayed great irritability and nervousness. At last Trelawny decided to go on to the Morea, and after some hesitation Byron gave him and Hamilton Browne letters of introduction to the Greek Government and bade them send him full information. After their departure, Byron dismissed the " Hercules " and took up his residence at Metaxata.

For some months Byron lingered in Cephalonia.

Internal quarrels were raging amongst the Greeks, and rival leaders were bidding for his support and urging different programmes upon him. But Byron realised the danger to the cause of these petty and senseless disputes, and vowed he would not move until they had composed their differences and united strongly against the common enemy. To their demands and requests he answered, "Make up your differences and act for the whole country instead of a fraction of it: I have come to help no one of you as a partisan, but all of you as a common friend: on touching your soil I must be welcomed as the Liberator of a United People." The most prominent leader of the Western Greeks was Prince Mavrocordato, and Byron sent by Colonel Stanhope, a member of the Greek Committee, a letter to him, as well as one to the Central Government, in which he insisted upon this question of unity.

Byron has been criticised for his action in remaining idle at Metaxata until the Greek leaders decided to agree instead of taking steps himself to bring about this agreement. The power of his influence was such, however, that this was probably the best course he could have taken. It is untrue to say that his own dilatoriness was the real cause of it, for he was heart and soul in the struggle and was considering only the good of Greece as a whole. Subsequent events proved that he had acted rightly.

At last, at the urgent requests of Prince Mavrocordato and General Stanhope, Byron decided to proceed to Missolonghi. He hired two Ionian vessels, sailing himself in a speedy mistico, while Gamba had charge of the horses, the London Committee's stores, munitions and money in a heavy bombard. The departure from Cephalonia was made on 29th December 1823,

and the voyage proved an adventurous one. Byron's ship was almost captured by a Turkish warship and was nearly wrecked on the Scrofes. Gamba's ship was actually taken, but as her captain had once saved the life of the Turkish commander, she was released. Both vessels reached Missolonghi safely on 4th January 1824.

Byron's reception was magnificent. The people acclaimed him like a prince, as if they believed implicitly in his power to protect them. A salute of guns announced his landing, and Prince Mavrocordato and his suite of officers welcomed him as if he were indeed the great Liberator on whom all their hopes were based. In the midst of these wild demonstrations of enthusiasm Byron bore himself well. Whether the opinion of the Cephalonians in favour of a foreign king for Greece had at this time directed his thoughts seriously towards the crown cannot be said, but at Missolonghi he acted as if the possibility of his election was not remote.

The poet busily engaged in efforts to organise the troops. He took five hundred Suliotes and formed them into his own bodyguard. He gave his attention to disciplining them, paying them from the funds which he had brought with him. His difficulties were enormous, and the demands upon him for money came from every side. He met the situation firmly and coolly, and forgot his military inexperience in the midst of these exciting events. He endeavoured to raise sums on his own credit, and energetically pursued the question of a substantial loan with the Greek Committee in London.

The first plan which he discussed was the despatch of an expedition against Lepanto. The fortress was

a key position to the Morea, and its possession would be an important factor in the conduct of future operations. Lepanto was defended by a weak garrison, who were thought to be in sympathy with the Greeks and would come over to their side. Byron was elected as commander-in-chief of the troops told off for the attack and was anxious to impress his soldiers with some outstanding military feat. But the troops were unruly, stores were lacking, and the necessary equipment for the venture was not to hand. To embark upon it at once was not practicable.

A difficult time of waiting made great demands on Byron's health, and it was apparent to all that he had undertaken a task for which he was physically incapable. On 5th February, William Parry and some English artisans, sent out by the Greek Committee with two mountain guns and a supply of ammunition, arrived at Missolonghi. Byron hoped with these to make final preparations for the assault on Lepanto, but his schemes were frustrated by a mutiny among the Suliotes. In the conduct of affairs at this time Byron became a level-headed commander, and showed himself to be a statesman and a born leader of men.

There can be nothing but admiration for the firm manner in which Byron handled this affair. Their demands included a month's pay in advance and the raising of about a third of their number to the rank of officers. Byron replied by a threat to discharge them all and cease to act as their leader. For the moment the mutineers submitted, 15th February 1824. Byron was seized the same day with a severe fit, and while he was recovering the Suliotes again became turbulent and burst into his room. The poet faced them with extraordinary courage and triumphed again over his

unruly soldiers. But trouble continued. A fight occurred between them and the guards of the arsenal, in which a Swedish officer was killed. The English artisans insisted on leaving for more peaceful surroundings, and the Suliotes were persuaded by a month's pay from Byron and some arrears from the Government to leave the town. With this the proposed expedition against Lepanto was abandoned.

Amidst these trials Byron manfully fought against his growing weakness and endeavoured to keep on good terms with all those with whom he was working. His health steadily declined, and his fits became more and more frequent, making the task increasingly difficult for him. He was at variance with Colonel Stanhope over the establishment of a political paper. He thought it better to fight the Turks than to write about them. In the end he gave way and even subsidised one of the Colonel's publications. Some of the articles of a revolutionary nature angered the poet, for he feared that they would have the effect of alienating the Powers, and he realised how much their sympathy meant to the Greek cause at this juncture.

Among the important acts of Byron at Missolonghi was the release of some Turkish prisoners, men, women, and children, whom he sent to their homes at his own expense. One little girl named Hatagée preferred to remain with him, and the poet decided to adopt her. Among his papers was found an unfinished letter to his sister, Mrs. Leigh, in which he asked if Lady Byron would allow the child to become a companion to his daughter, Ada. Afterwards he decided to send her to Dr. Kennedy; but the matter is interesting as showing that there was some communication at this time with his wife, even if it was indirect. Indeed,

there was a letter from Lady Byron discovered, which Mrs. Leigh had forwarded, and which answered enquiries that Byron had made about Ada. It shows that his wife and daughter were in his thoughts during this, the closing and most noble period of his life.

Meanwhile events were shaping well for the Greek cause. Odysseus, leader of the Eastern Greeks, with whom was Trelawny, made a proposal for summoning at Salona a conference of the leaders. It was an attempt, outwardly at least, to arrange the differences between the two factions and establish that unity which Byron had always so strongly advocated. There was, however, no doubt that Odysseus and those with him were jealous of the fact that Mavrocordato had Byron with him at Missolonghi. They feared that the Englishman's influence would be thrown on their rival's side to their own detriment. Byron himself had foreseen this danger and did not wish to have the appearance of favouring one faction more than the other. He was, therefore, strongly in favour of the Salona meeting, but Mavrocordato showed no enthusiasm, and wished to keep Byron for himself and his own party, if he could. The poet dealt tactfully with the Greek leader; and his hand was strengthened by the news that he had been appointed one of the three Commissioners for the loan, negotiations for which had progressed satisfactorily. Mavrocordato was persuaded to agree to the conference, and Byron wrote on 23rd March, " In a few days P. Mavrocordato and myself, with a considerable escort, intend to proceed to Salona at the request of Ulysses and the Chiefs of Eastern Greece, and take measures offensive and defensive for the ensuing campaign." The

difficulties were largely a question of money, and it was hoped that these would now be removed.

Byron had been endeavouring with the assistance of William Parry to place the defences of Missolonghi in a more satisfactory state and to organise a force which might prove an effective garrison. The task was an arduous one, and the poet's friends were seriously concerned about his health. Trelawny was anxious to entice Byron away from the fever swamps in which he was living, and attendance at the Salona conference might have prevented the last illness which proved fatal. Other efforts to induce him to leave had proved futile, and the offer of a country house in Cephalonia had merely brought the reply that he intended to stay where he was.

It was a great misfortune that for some reason or other the meeting of the Greek leaders at Salona was postponed until it was too late for Byron to attend. Not only was this so for reasons of health, but there are good grounds for believing that, had he been present, he would have been invited to become King of Greece.

Byron stayed on at Missolonghi, and on 9th April he went for a ride with Petro Gamba, was caught in the rain and wet through. The next day he was ill with fever, but nevertheless insisted on going out on horseback. He had now developed rheumatic fever and became worse; and during the ensuing week he began to sink rapidly. His doctors were inferior and inexperienced and could only think of bleeding him. He became steadily weaker, and on the 18th two other doctors were brought to look at him. They were unable to render any assistance; and about six o'clock in the evening he fell into his last sleep, lying in a state

of unconsciousness for twenty-four hours. He died at 6.15 p.m. on 19th April 1824.

Before he had quite lost the power of speech, Byron endeavoured to give some last instructions to Fletcher, his servant, who was, unfortunately, quite unable to understand them. Several varying accounts of this last tragic scene have been given, but all that can confidently be said is that the poet's last thoughts were with his wife, his daughter, Ada, and his sister, Mrs. Leigh.

Odysseus, supported by Colonel Stanhope, proposed that Byron's body should be sent to Athens and interred in the Temple of Theseus. This would doubtless have been the poet's wish. He had no desire to be brought home to England for burial. His own request was, "Let not my body be hacked or sent to England. Here let my bones moulder. Lay me in the first corner without pomp or nonsense."

Byron's wishes were quite disregarded. His heart was given to the citizens of Missolonghi and placed in a mausoleum in the country, the liberation of which was his last purpose. His body was sent to England, after receiving funeral honours in Greece such as are accorded only to princes. The tug, "Florida," bearing the remains, arrived in the Downs on 1st July. For two days the body lay in state at the house of Sir Edward Knatchbull in Great George Street, Westminster, and the long funeral procession to Nottinghamshire was then begun.

The cortège was followed by a long train of mourners as far as St. Pancras. It passed the house in Kentish Town, where the widow of Shelley watched it from the window; and when near Nottingham, was met accidentally by Lady Caroline Lamb, who fainted on hearing that the dead was Byron.

The poet's final resting-place was the family vault at Hucknall-Torkard, where he was laid beneath the chancel of the village church on the 16th July 1824—a mile or two from the ancestral home of Newstead Abbey, for which he had so deep an affection. A memorial tablet was placed in the chancel of the church by his sister, Mrs. Leigh.

Those who were responsible for refusing the offer of the Greeks to bury Byron at Athens and for sending his body to England, believed, no doubt, that it would find a place amongst the great in the national shrine of Westminster Abbey. Had they known that this deserved honour would be refused, they would have placed him in the soil of the country which he had lauded in his poems and in whose cause he had given his life.

It was greatly to be regretted that, for the same reasons which blinded men to his genius and prompted them to withhold their recognition, the greatest international poet which England has produced, with the single exception of Shakespeare, should lie in an obscure corner of his native land, and that it should have been left to the Greek King to present the slab of marble which covers his tomb.

It was 14th May before the tragic news reached England; and when it did, the sentence, "Byron is dead," rang through London, striking men dumb with the awful solemnity of the fact. The impression created was so profound that to attempt description is well-nigh impossible. Jane Welsh said: "If they had said the sun or the moon was gone out of the heavens, it could not have struck me with the idea of a more awful and dreary blank." Carlyle and Southey left records of how deeply they were affected

by the news ; and Tennyson, it is said, felt that the whole world was darkened, and went out into the woods and cut on a tree, "Byron is dead." The tributes from foreign lands were such as the death of no other Englishman had evoked. Ringing with admiration, with appreciation and affection, they hailed him as the born leader of freedom and the soldier poet of Liberty.

The romantic end of Byron, the death with honour in a foreign land, fighting in a noble cause, wipes out the stain of much that was discreditable in his life. Even his most relentless critics cannot blind themselves to the glory of it. Only the petty and mean would seek to disparage it. Byron was not ignorant of his own faults. He knew that he had wasted much of his life, and he shrank from the contemplation of the degradation which it had witnessed. But the finer feelings of nobility and chivalry were not dead in him. When the call came to play a manly rôle in a cause that was dear to his heart, he disengaged himself from the old entanglements and bravely answered it. He was aware that physically he could not survive the task he had set himself. He left for Greece, knowing that he would never return. But he did not flinch. He was conscious of the higher feelings within him, and meant to show the world that the real Byron was not merely a man of satire, cynicism, and licentiousness. It was his hope to die in action, to meet the death of a soldier. This was not to be his end. But disease struck him down, as he stood staunchly at the post of duty, as he was giving all that was best in his nature, and all that he had of material possessions to the battle for freedom and right.

The energy, the loyalty, the judgment, firmness,

and courage of the man during this final phase of his life should obliterate the memory of the failings which marked his early years. He is seen as a born leader of men, a man with unique individuality and wonderful personality, on whom circumstances had played many a dastardly trick. He was at bottom a man of action ; and had he lived, he would probably have given proof of it as king of a free people. Denied a life as a man of action, he became famous as a man of letters. With the exception of Shakespeare, no other English name is more potent throughout the world than that of Byron, idol of Europe, poet of the revolution.

The death of Lord Byron at Missolonghi at the early age of thirty-six was more than an event in literature ; it was an event in the history of European thought, pregnant with momentous consequences in politics, and with social consequence more momentous still. It set the laurels of the hero upon the poet, whose burning words were fermenting in the minds of the young and the impressionable, as Rousseau's had fermented in those of a generation before.

Byron wrote in 1803 :

> My epitaph shall be my name alone :
> If *that* with honour fail to crown my clay,
> Oh ! may no other fame my deeds repay !
> *That*, only *that*, shall single out the spot ;
> By that remember'd, or with that forgot.

Of Greece he penned the following :

> The mountains look on Marathon—
> And Marathon looks on the sea ;
> And musing there one hour alone,
> I dreamt that Greece might still be free ;
> For standing on the Persian's grave
> I could not deem myself a slave.
>
> *Don Juan, LXXXV*, 3.

When Lord Byron wrote these beautiful lines, he was not aware that they were half prophetic, or that he himself would figure so conspicuously in the great and glorious work of Grecian independence. Yet so it was. Not content with singing pæans to liberty, and thus inspiring a martial spirit in others, he added example to precept by exchanging the poet's pen for the warrior's sword—the service of the Muses for the service of Mars—learned ease for the tented field, with its multiplied cares, privations, and dangers.

Mr. Harold Nicolson says :

> "Lord Byron accomplished nothing at Missolonghi except his own death ; but by that single act of heroism he secured the liberation of Greece. Had Byron, as he was urged, deserted the Hellenic cause in February 1824, there would have been no Navarino ; the whole history of south-eastern Europe would have developed differently."

The World's Great Authors

An Appreciation

Authors Make their Countries Famous

Ideas of what constitutes real greatness in a country or a people have been undergoing a process of transformation during recent years. Disillusionment was visited on the old conceptions by the widespread suffering of the Great War.

The popular notion of national greatness had for too long rested on such things as the power of armaments, material wealth and prosperity, pomp and circumstance, aggressive imperialism, widespread dominion, and victorious war. Such an estimate is built upon bases that are entirely false. That nation having the most powerful army or navy, the most numerous colonies, the busiest industries, or the most luxurious standard of living is not necessarily the greatest in the real sense of the term. Such advantages may lead to pride, selfishness, materialism, tyranny, whereas the true greatness of a people lies in their contribution to the spiritual riches of the world.

The great conqueror, the dazzling but oppressive emperor, the ambitious statesman, the exploiter of subject races, the self-seeking trader, and such like, create fear, hatred, distrust, envy, and hostility toward their country. These are not the harvest of true greatness. It is not what a nation achieves in its own interests, but what it gives toward the improvement and elevation of mankind that determine its claim to glory. Nothing that is gained at the expense of other people's sufferings can enhance a country's

repute. Everything that is expended to assist the backward, unfortunate, and unenlightened must enrich the giver ethically. Principles not money, quality not quantity, justice not power, contentment not greed, humanity not aggression, peace not war, are the purifying agencies that honour the only throne of national greatness—the soul of a people.

It is only necessary to recall how fleeting were the triumphs based upon force, egotism, ambition, voracity, and kindred vices to realise how fallacious such a conception of greatness is. The empire of Alexander the Great, for instance, dissolved on his death. The empire of Rome fell into a process of slow decay. The empires of Attila, Charlemagne, and Napoleon could not endure. The New World empires of Portugal, Spain, and Holland broke in pieces. The British Empire seemed in the eighteenth century to be going the same way. But Britain has assimilated some of the more striking lessons of history, abandoned the old imperial ideas, and adopted those of freedom, justice, and humanity, which alone have qualities of permanence.

One of the most general ways in which a country has earned the admiration and gratitude of the peoples of the world, and therein won the only kind of greatness that is worth having, is through contributions to art and literature. Among civilising influences the great genius has an important place, for he understands and speaks to the soul of humanity ; and while his ideas may be clothed in his own mother-tongue, so universal is his appeal that little is lost by translation into the different languages of his cosmopolitan admirers. Universality is the test of genius and showers glory upon the country of its origin.

Limiting ourselves to literature, let us see how the great authors of the world have made their countries famous. We shall find that they have advanced the prestige of their nation farther than all the kings and queens, all the princes, priests, and politicians put together.

A striking example—perhaps the most striking of all examples—of a nation made famous by its authors is the Children of Israel. That wonderful collection of books, grouped under the name of the Old Testament, has conferred immortality on all the leaders, judges, kings, prophets, the writers themselves, of a comparatively small and unimportant nation living in an age that was historically dark. A very little, indeed, would be known of Palestine and its people in the centuries before Christ but for the poets and chroniclers of Israel. Nevertheless, if these records had merely contained accounts of wars, rebellions, conquests, captivities, and kingship, they would have been neglected by all but the antiquarians and archæologists. It is because of their strong spiritual appeal, the divine message that runs through them and every now and then peeps from the mass of secular data, that they have become the most closely-studied writings in the whole world with the single exception of those that issued from part of the same land—Judea of the early Christians. David the conqueror is a person of small importance in the history of mankind, but David the psalmist is enthroned for ever in the human heart. The glories of Solomon are dust, but the words of Isaiah live in the conscience. And it is the psalmist and the prophet that have brought fame to the kings, priests, and princes, who without them would have passed into oblivion.

The greatest service that authorship has ever rendered to mankind is the preservation of the teachings of Jesus of Nazareth. This wayside preacher, moving from place to place, living on what the grateful chose to give him, might have delivered his message in vain but for the guardianship of the written word. No doubt, his sayings would have been handed down from generation to generation by word of mouth, as was the usual procedure in the earliest literature. But the errors, inaccuracies, omissions, and complexities, which we find in such literature, would have crept in to obscure the beautiful doctrine of the Kingdom of Heaven and the Brotherhood of Man.

Jesus himself had said that His words in a spiritual sense should not pass away ; and it would be interesting to speculate whether He made any suggestion or arrangement for their committal to writing for human preservation. Certain it is that the Gospels were in existence less than thirty years after His death ; while there are grounds for thinking that those of Mark, Luke, and Matthew were derived from an even earlier document. It is impossible to compute the debt the world owes to these authors, as well as to the scholar, Paul, whose letters, written in excellent Greek, are of incalculable religious and historical importance. To the cultured Luke we are also indebted for the Acts of the Apostle, and to Peter, John, and others for further enlightening epistles ; while that marvellous spiritual prophecy of the Apocalypse completes a collection of writings that has done more to improve and advance the thought of the most civilised nations than any other artistic or literary influence.

Leaving the realm of religious authorship, we find that even without so lofty a theme, poets and historians

were able to immortalise persons and events and crown them with a halo of undying fame. The reputation of the great heroes of the siege of Troy was secured for ever by the lines of Homer, and the glory of the victory of Salamis preserved for all time by the pæan of Pindar. Not only on prominent personalities or outstanding events, but on a nation as a whole, on its civilisation and culture, have the great authors conferred honour and immortality by works of genius. Nothing can ever rob Greece of the enviable distinction of creating the drama; and that superb triumvirate of dramatic poets, Æschylus, Sophocles, and Euripides, have perpetuated the Greek influence and attracted scholars and thinkers of every age and race to the study and appreciation of their people and their culture. Nor do the Greek authors limit the praise of their country's intellectual and artistic development to the realms of epic poetry and tragedy. Aristophanes in comedy, Herodotus, Thucydides, and Zenophon in history, Plutarch in biography, and such world-famous names as Aristotle and Plato in philosophy, declare the undying glory of Attic learning and award Greece one of the world's most lofty spiritual thrones.

Perhaps the creative genius of the Greeks has never quite been equalled by any other people. So transcending has been their influence that subsequent literature has betrayed considerable imitation. Nevertheless, the poets and writers of Rome won imperishable honour for the Latin tongue. The Roman Empire belongs to the ages, the old city is a ruin, the language is dead, but the fame, the honour, the splendour lives on in the works of the orators, poets, and historians. Nothing remains of those mighty conquests from the Atlantic to Mesopotamia, from

Britain to Africa, but we have still with us the poems of Lucretius, Catullus, Virgil, Ovid, Horace, and Juvenal, the oratory of Cicero, the histories of Cæsar, Livy, and Tacitus, and the plays of Seneca, Plautus, and Terence.

With the passing of the classical period came what are known as the dark ages. For hundreds of years genius slumbered, and not a single masterpiece was produced. Not that authorship was entirely dead. It was not. Writers still wielded the pen, and the flickering flame of Greek and Roman influence was saved from extinction. France was the centre of what intellectual life there was at this epoch; and Charlemagne made a serious, if unfruitful, attempt to develop the arts at his court. The dark ages, however, were a time of literary famine, and there is a significant consequence to be noted. Ask anyone interested in history—not a professor who has made it a life study, but an ordinary educated and well-read man—of what period he is most ignorant. You will find that the average answer embraces the dark ages. Whereas most people are fairly well acquainted with the story of Rome, of Greece, of Israel, of modern Europe, the gap between the decay of the classics and the Renaissance is more or less a blank. True, an Englishman knows something of the history of England during this time—the Norman Kings, the Plantaganets, the Crusades, the Magna Charta, the duels with Wales and Scotland, and the Hundred Years War with France. But the course of history on the Continent, except in so far as it affected England, is a closed book to him. It would, however, be as familiar to him as other periods of the world's history had there been a Luke, a Homer, or an Ovid to focus his attention upon it.

In the fourteenth century France lost her literary hegemony to Italy. The dark ages were ended by the rise of one of the world's supreme geniuses in the person of Dante. He was quickly followed by the most illustrious and scholarly Petrarch, and the father of the novelists, Boccaccio. These three great men created a new prose, superseded mediocrity, refuelled the lamps of learning, and pointed the way to the Renaissance. They raised Italy to the pinnacle of artistic fame. They won for their country the homage of the enlightened world. Italy became the centre from which the new learning spread over Europe. She was the acknowledged cradle of culture. Scholars and artists considered a visit to Italy an essential part of their education. Her poets and painters exercised an all-embracing influence. To take a single example, it is almost impossible to measure the debt which our own Elizabethan dramatists owe to Boccaccio. Shakespeare himself went to him for material for "All's Well that Ends Well" and "Cymbeline." From Chaucer onwards, Boccaccio had left his impression upon authors of other nations. So it was with his brilliant countrymen, who made their native land the centre of culture and the leader of civilisation.

The story continues through the annals of modern Europe. The great authors and artists are those who win credit for their countries in the spiritual realm. And how much more to be desired is the honour, appreciation, and gratitude that a nation's literary achievements gain than the fear, suspicion, and rivalry engendered by material power, wealth, and aggression! In the sixteenth century Spain owned the mightiest empire that had been known up to that time. Did that achievement make her understood by the world,

loved and respected, honoured and trusted? The exact opposite was the case. Hostility and hatred, bitter opposition and rivalry, were her portion; and at the last she fell from her proud position, and her glories existed only in the memory. What empire and armadas failed to do, however, was accomplished by Cervantes. His "Don Quixote" was translated into nearly every European language and became a classic. He made all the world laugh, and with that "One touch of nature" that "makes the whole world kin" ("Troilus and Cressida," III., 3, 175) did more to establish his country in humanity's favour than all the monarchs and statesmen whom she had ever produced.

Similar services have been performed for France by Molière, Balzac, Rousseau, Voltaire, Victor Hugo, and Dumas; for Germany by Lessing, Schiller, Schlegel, and Goethe; for Norway by Ibsen; for Russia by Tolstoi and Tchekov. These men, geniuses in their several lines, and other names and nations too numerous to mention, have won a place for their countries in the universal temple of honour; they have made their countrymen known to the other citizens of the world, thus establishing a contact which breeds mutual liking and appreciation and banishes hatred, envy, and misunderstanding.

Chaucer, Byron, and Dickens, with many others, have performed a similar service for England to that performed by the great authors of Israel, Greece, Rome, France, Italy, Germany, for their respective countries. The man, however, who has won all peoples' appreciation and admiration, the man who has done most to make England known and appreciated throughout the world, is certainly Shakespeare. The genius of this English-born, English-bred poet has called forth the universal homage of mankind and placed to the credit of our country the greatest achievement of all time in the realm of literature.

England has had her great kings and statesmen, gallant admirals, brave generals, dauntless pioneers, empire-builders, scientists, inventors, traders, and engineers ; but no single Englishman has won, either from the world at large, or from his fellow-countrymen, the praise that is Shakespeare's. No single Englishman has done so much to make England famous as the inspired poet of Stratford-on-Avon.

Shakespeare was born in the heart of the English midlands, between the pastoral district of the Cotswold and the remains of the great Forest of Arden. The ancient market town of Stratford, pleasantly situated on the banks of the Avon, was a typical centre of a thriving agricultural area. Shortly before the poet's birth in April 1564 it had been constituted a corporation ; and his father, John Shakespeare, was

a burgess. That a country-bred lad should develop into the world's greatest poet is indeed a wonder. Some have refused to believe it possible and, searching feverishly for another possible author for the dramatic masterpieces, have fixed on Bacon, a man with a dry, legal, scientific mind, who could no more have reflected the warmth and colour of nature than a peacock could repeat the sweet sounds of a nightingale. A very general mistake is to picture the young Shakespeare as an ignorant, slow-witted, unimaginative farmer's boy, who underwent some marvellous transformation. This rustic conception is an erroneous one. John Shakespeare was a man of considerable local importance and, after filling several municipal posts, was for a time in charge of the town's finance. His business interests were various. A glover by trade, he also seems to have engaged in farming and dealt in such agricultural produce as barley, wool, and timber. Moreover, he owned property in the town ; and further estate was brought to him by his wife, Mary Arden, whom he married in 1556.

Shakespeare, then, was not a dull, ignorant yokel, but the son of one of Stratford-on-Avon's foremost citizens. It is reasonable to assume that he would be given as good an education as this thriving centre could produce. Nor were the educational opportunities in any way inferior. There was a free Grammar School under a competent headmaster, where the curriculum would include Latin and other subjects essential to a sound training. Such a schooling might seem inferior to men like Ben Jonson, who had enjoyed the advantage of a full university course, and whose reference to Shakespeare's " small Latin and less Greek " has done much harm in belittling the

poet's store of scholarship. With his wonderful gift for absorbing and retaining all he learned, a gift that impresses itself upon every appreciative reader of his works, it is safe to believe that the young lad made the greatest use of the hours at school and learned all his lesson-books could teach him.

Books, however, were not the poet's only, or even most important, fount of knowledge. His observant spirit learned much more from Nature. His fellow-beings, the trees, the birds, natural phenomena—all were unfailing springs for his thirsty soul. So deep were his early impressions from these several sources that they are reproduced over and over again in his plays, clothed in all his perfected beauty of language. Those wanderings through the Arden woods, the fields, the hedgerows jewelled with wild flowers, are remembered in the forest scenes of "A Midsummer Night's Dream" and "As You Like It." The river Avon, shadowed by its slanting willows, becomes the scene of poor Ophelia's death in "Hamlet." The sheep-shearing festival of the Cotswolds, a carnival event that would delight a boy who took an interest in everything around him, reappears in "The Winter's Tale." In the Induction to "The Taming of the Shrew" the dramatist actually introduced local people by name into his play—Christopher Sly, Marian Hacket, Old John Naps, Peter Turph, and Henry Pimpernell. Aubrey tells us that once, when compelled to shelter from the rain, he was so amused by two garrulous old villagers, that he used them both in "A Midsummer Night's Dream." It is an old tradition that the poet had his revenge on Sir Thomas Lucy, whose threat to prosecute him for poaching on his estate caused him to leave

Stratford, by ridiculing the Warwickshire magnet in the ridiculous Justice Shallow. Familiar local types are reproduced in such characters as Bottom, Quince, Dull, Silence, Falstaff's recruits, and many more. When we have typical country people of the Midlands appearing as Shakespearean characters, some actually bearing the names of the poet's contemporaries—when we have obscure villages around Stratford also named —when we have words of the Cotswold dialect put into the mouths of country bumpkins, not only does it establish beyond all possible dispute or argument the Shakespearean authorship of the plays, but it strengthens the claim of the " Swan of Avon " to the title of England's national poet. No other has done so much to make the real heart of England known to the outside world.

About 1584 Shakespeare's life at Stratford seems to have closed. The poaching affair, referred to above, is most generally given as the cause. He was then twenty, and for the next eight years we are completely without biographical data of any sort. Conjectures there are in plenty. Some, basing their contention on the internal evidence of the plays, are convinced in their own minds that a visit to Italy, the artistic hub of the world, occupied a part of that time. They are unable to account for his scholarship and knowledge and the local colour of the Italian settings in any other way. Some, again, point to the very faithful descriptive details of Elsinore in " Hamlet " and accept them as evidence that Shakespeare was a member of the company of English actors which is known to have visited the Danish fortress town in 1585. Others affirm that the poet acquired all his knowledge from books and conversation with that unparalleled gift

for acquisition that was his, and that he himself never at any time went abroad. Scholars cannot agree on how he spent those hidden years ; and he is variously stated to have been a scrivener, a dyer, a printer, an apothecary, a soldier, and a schoolmaster in the country. More humble offices are imputed to him ; and there is an old legend that he commenced his connection with the stage by holding the horses of the gallants who attended the theatre. This blank in Shakespeare's life story can only be filled by pure surmise, but this much we can say : He was certainly extending his knowledge of England, English society, English manners and customs, English history, and English hopes and aspirations, and was able by his genius to give them later expression and description in that volume of dramatic literature which constitutes him our supreme national poet.

Historical record picks up Shakespeare again in 1592, when he was twenty-eight years old. It is obvious he had been associated with the theatre for some time, for he had begun serious work as a dramatist, and with such success, that he had aroused the jealousy of one of the established playwrights, Robert Greene, who styled him "an upstart crow." Greene also refers to his "Tygers heart wrapt in a Players hide," showing that he was an acting member of his company. Part at least, then, of those hidden eight years was spent as a working actor, a reviser of old plays, and in first attempts at original dramatic creation.

Actors, dramatists, and poets existed in those splendid Elizabethan days by sheltering under the patronage of the great nobles of the court. The various theatrical companies were on the lordly rolls

of retainers. Thus Shakespeare's own company was in turn sponsored by the Earl of Leicester, the Earl of Derby, and the Lord Chamberlain. After the death of Elizabeth, they were taken over by James I himself, became known as the King's Men, and received the status of Grooms of the Chamber. Only by such an arrangement were the actors given the opportunity to develop their art, for the profession was looked down upon by all self-respecting and self-satisfied citizens, and no legal standing was accorded to it. In fact, only by becoming the servant of a nobleman could an actor escape arrest as a vagabond. The system had its advantages, for it brought the players and authors to the notice of the sovereign and her courtiers, in other words, in contact with the highest wealth, scholarship, culture, and refinement of the day.

When Shakespeare's story emerges from the mist of the eight dark years, we find him already on terms of friendship with certain of the nobility. His own particular patron was Henry Wriothesley, the brilliant young Earl of Southampton, to whom the long poems "Venus and Adonis" and "The Rape of Lucrece," were dedicated. These works were published in 1593 and 1594 respectively, a period when riots had closed the London theatres and plague had kept them closed. The state of the intimacy between peer and poet may be gathered from the story, recorded by Sir William Davenant, that Southampton lent Shakespeare a thousand pounds for his own uses—a very considerable sum in those days. The young earl is believed by many to be the friend to whom the beautiful sonnets are addressed. It is eloquent of Shakespeare's standing in the society of the day that other men of the highest rank are suggested as the one to whom these intimate

lines were written. One of these is William Herbert, Earl of Pembroke ; while several famous Elizabethan gallants must have been flattered by what Francis Meres describes as Shakespeare's "sugred sonnets among his private friends." The Queen herself was not slow to honour the poet ; and there is a firmly-rooted tradition that "The Merry Wives of Windsor" was written at Elizabeth's own request, after she had been so entertained by the character of Falstaff that she required the playwright to show her the fat knight in love. The royal favour was bestowed with equal readiness by King James, so that our national poet moved in the highest and most brilliant circles and was qualified to reflect the real England of his day.

Shakespeare's England was such as to inspire a national poet. The unhappy divisions, which had torn the country with civil strife in the bloody Wars of the Roses, were far enough in the past for the consciousness of a united nation to have taken definite shape. Under Henry VII and Henry VIII a process of progressive consolidation was witnessed, until a feeling of national unity and self-sufficiency became established in the minds of the people, strengthened by the repudiation of the religious fetters of Rome. England had emerged from a period of bitter and engrossing family quarrels to find herself a nation with opportunities and possibilities, and with the ability and resources to profit by them. She saw that she had allowed her rivals, Spain and Portugal, to steal a march upon her in the exploitation of the glittering discoveries in the New World. She considered herself entitled to a place in the sun and resented the claims of Spain to a monopoly. She challenged it, and was elated by the successes of her bold fighting men and

dazzled by the treasure which they poured into her lap. She knew that she was bound to rouse the wrath of Spain, and she did it deliberately, with a quiet confidence that she could counter any attempt to punish her temerity. This confidence was justified when the exasperated Spaniards despatched their mighty Armada to crush the nuisances, and themselves met overwhelming disaster. The gravity of the peril, the steadiness and courage required to meet it, and the glorious outcome deepened the national consciousness and created a firm conviction of expanded activities and a great future ahead. Such events must have stirred the dullest, grossest hearts in England; and their effect upon the flaming, creative genius of the poet are apparent in his dramatic masterpieces. Moreover, these masterpieces are accepted with gratitude by other nations, who have forgotten the circumstances of their inspiration in their enthusiasm for their literary excellence.

The confidence, self-esteem, and optimism which filled the English people under Elizabeth had popularised a fashion in drama known as the Chronicle play. At the beginning of Shakespeare's writing career the type was very much in favour, the public appetite having been whetted by such successes as Marlowe's "Edward II" and Peele's "Edward I." The new dramatist followed the prevailing vogue, and his first plays were "The Contention of York and Lancaster" (revised under the titles of "2 Henry VI" and "3 Henry VI"), "1 Henry VI," "Richard III," and Edward III" (part only). After numerous comedies and "Romeo and Juliet" had been written, the historical series was resumed in 1595 with "King John," followed by "Richard II" (1596), "1 Henry

IV" (1597), "2 Henry IV" (1598), and "Henry V" (1599). When it was decided to revive the history play for a gorgeous production at the Globe Theatre in 1613, the success which Shakespeare had won in this line caused him to be called out of his retirement to collaborate with the young dramatist, Fletcher, in composing that magnificent pageant, "Henry VIII."

Before he could write his Chronicle plays, Shakespeare had to make a close study of English history. He devoured Holinshed and other authorities, and few among his contemporaries can have been so thorough a history scholar. The stirring tale of England's evolution quite obviously roused his enthusiasm; and we find in him a real love of his country, a deep insight into the English national character, and a participation in that awakened national consciousness, which claimed a foremost place in the present world, with an abiding faith in the high future destiny of the race. In his series of Chronicle plays, covering English history from the Magna Charta to the Reformation, Shakespeare did not bind himself by minute and accurate historical detail. He was content to submit chronology to dramatic exigences so long as he portrayed the soul of England under the fiery trials which compelled its development. The historical period which Shakespeare's dramatic writings embraced witnessed the emergence from the feudal system, with all its civil, internecine strife, to the birth and maturing of the one national spirit. In these troublesome times was created that England which became a world-power and the leader in civilisation and progress, and which gave evidence of her real greatness in the brilliant literary age of Shakespeare, Spenser, Marlowe, Peele, Lyly, Kyd, Greene, Jonson, Fletcher, and Beaumont.

Our national poet, then, told the tale of England during the birth-pangs of her greatness. The kings, generals, and feudal lords, the battles, risings, and tortuous diplomacy, the triumphs, ambitions, and disappointments of the great, and the sufferings and injustices of the poor—all would have been forgotten beyond the boundaries of Britain if they had not been preserved for ever in literature by the transcendent genius of Shakespeare. It is true that the Chronicle series have not been favourites for performance on foreign stages on account of the exclusively English interest of their plots. But scholars of all nations, lovers of poetry, worshippers of genius, have studied these dramas for the sake of the poet, and have become acquainted with historical matter, which otherwise would not have deserved their attention. Herein is as good an example as there could be of the truth that it is the great author who really makes his country famous.

The circumstances of his upbringing, his entry into brilliant court circles, though in a humble capacity, and his absorption in historical books, fired Shakespeare with a patriotism which found expression in exquisite poetry. The influences beneath which he lived and the atmosphere in which he moved made him royalist to the core. It was natural, of course, for a poet seeking favour to flatter the great ones upon whose patronage his very existence depended; and the works of Shakespeare contain sufficient examples of this weakness. There is no mistaking the poet's real convictions, however. Like the great majority of his contemporaries, he believed in the divine right of kings and gave to royalty the homage that such a belief required. It was to be expected

that when he set himself to portray the ideal Englishman, his character should be a crowned head. In Faulconbridge and the English soldiery he had emphasised certain of the admirable English traits, but all-round perfection was aimed at in the delineation of Henry V. For this purpose he allowed himself to step beyond the limitations of true history. Henry V was not, of course, the paragon of all the virtues that Shakespeare would have us believe ; but this can be said for the victor of Agincourt—while he sat on the throne, England counted for more in the world than at any time during the period with which the dramatist deals in his long series of pieces. Henry secured peace within his borders and a foretaste of that national consciousness that emerged from the bitter struggle of the Roses.

A royalist, an historian, an admirer of the national character, Shakespeare's title of the Poet of Patriotism is well and truly earned. No country has been praised by her poets in more superb and moving song. Where is the national bard who has sung with more stirring eloquence than our English Shakespeare in that magnificent speech of John of Gaunt in " Richard II," " This royal throne of kings, this scepter'd isle," or the thrilling call to battle by Henry V before Harfleur, " Once more into the breach, dear friends, once more " ? Other examples abound. The proud words of Faulconbridge in " King John," " This England never did, nor never shall, Lie at the proud feet of a conqueror " ; the speech of the British Queen in " Cymbeline," stressing " the natural bravery of your isle " ; and the frequent eulogies of England and Englishmen that the poet puts into the mouths of French opponents—all are the expression of Shakespeare's deep-seated

love of country. His sentiment has been published to the whole world and shared by those not of our blood, who have been conquered by the beauty of the poetry.

Shakespeare's own contribution to the fame of England, as distinct from making her and the deeds of her sons famous through the beauty of his language, was in the foundation of the national drama. Here is a field in which our country leads the world, and to Shakespeare the chief credit is due. His peculiar genius enabled him to break through the limitations that had hedged in his predecessors. He began, as we have seen, with the Chronicle play, and so perfected it that none were able to follow him in this field with any hope of success. In his Roman plays he was freer still in the dramatic rendering of historical data, and, refusing to be cramped by the old traditions, created a model that has influenced all historic drama since his period. In his masterpieces, "Hamlet," "Macbeth," "King Lear," and "Othello," he attained the supreme height of tragedy, portraying the fall of some great soul, noble except for one weakness, but a weakness upon which the exceptional circumstances of the plot worked to encompass his eventual ruin. Here were the possibilities of the drama fully revealed, and never again could it be confined within the old narrow dimensions. Although there have always been found critics to decry Shakespeare's dramatic construction—and construction was not one of his strongest points—yet it was in this very field that he claimed his independence of Attic drama and built up his plots with the intricate interweaving of sub-plots to satisfy the insatiable public demand for incident. But the drama owes most to Shakespeare for his wonderful gift of

characterisation. Though his influence on all subsequent style and construction is immense, yet it is in the representation of real and ordinary men and women, types of everyday life, that he stands the unchallenged master. High and low, male and female, tragic and comic, are drawn with a fidelity that has never been approached and remain a standard which all aspirants to greatness must attempt to reach. Here, then, is the crowning example of honour and glory conferred upon a country by an author. To quote Sir Sidney Lee, "The First Folio forms the greatest contribution in a single volume to the literature of any age or country, and by the English-speaking peoples it must always be regarded as the proudest monument of their literature."

That the work of Shakespeare would live was fully recognised by his contemporaries. To preserve his masterpieces for posterity was the aim of his fellow-actors, Heminge and Condell, in gathering quarto copies of his plays, editing them, and issuing them in one volume of 36 plays in 1623. All the dramas usually attributed to Shakespeare were included except "Pericles," and some of them are acknowledged to be the highest achievement of the human mind in the realm of dramatic poetry. This treasured First Folio contained eulogistic verses by other poets, in which the immortality of Shakespeare's work is confidently predicted. Jonson wrote, "He was not of an age but for all time." Leonard Digges declared, "Be sure, our Shakespeare, thou canst never die, But, crowned with laurel, live eternally." Hugh Holland lauded "the dainty playes," which "crowned him poet first, then Poet's King." Richard Carew, in his "Excellence of the English Language"

wrote, "Would you read Catullus? Take Shakespeare. . . ." Francis Meres, who published his "Wits Treasury" in 1598, which the "Encyclopædia Britannica" describes as "a kind of literary handbook," gave a list of twelve plays written by that date. He recorded his opinion that "the sweet wittie soule of Ovid lives in mellifluous and hony-tongued Shakespeare," and added that as Plautus and Seneca were "accounted the best for comedy and tragedy among the Latins, so Shakespeare among ye English is most excellent in both kinds for the Stage." In the same year Richard Barnfield wrote: "And Shakespeare, thou whose hony-flowing vaine. . . . Thy name in Fame's Immortal Booke has placed." The prescience of these contemporaries, especially of that very searching critic, Ben Jonson, who confessed, "I lov'd the man and do honour his memory (on this side idolatry) as much as any," has been fully borne out by the full-throated chorus of praise which in every civilised country and in every succeeding century has glorified the national poet of England, and through him the land of England itself.

The World's Appreciation of Shakespeare

Like the poet's contemporaries, the literary giants of England in all ages have acknowledged the lasting qualities of Shakespeare's work, and paid homage to the undying glory of his genius. Led by Milton, who called him "Dear Sonne of Memory, Great Heir of Fame," the hymn was taken up by Dryden, Pope, Dr. Johnson, Wordsworth, Coleridge, Charles Lamb, Shelley, Carlyle, Tennyson, Swinburne, down to the great authors and dramatists of our own day. It was natural that the poet of England should win the applause of his fellow-countrymen, familiar, as they are, with his surrounding influences—the beloved countryside, the well-known types of men and women, racial prejudices, national characteristics, aims, and ambitions. The test of a poet's greatness is, however, his universal appeal. The highest kind of genius penetrates beyond the superficial differences of race and creed and finds the fundamental similarities common to all human nature. By his sympathetic handling of the emotions, fears, and aspirations, which are the experience of all mortals, he can render himself intelligible and inspiring to humanity at large.

In all time no poet of any nation has so completely fulfilled these requirements of real greatness as Shakespeare. Sir Sidney Lee rightly said that only the Scriptures themselves have interested a reading public so world-wide. We find the authors, dramatists, poets, critics, and philosophers of all those nations who lead

the world's culture, recognising a master mind and studying his works with the humble mental attitude of pupils and disciples. Some there are who find cause for criticism, but, even against their inclination, they are compelled to acknowledge that the English poet reigns supreme.

Shakespeare's first successes in foreign lands were won in Germany, in spite of the fact that the author and critic, Gottsched, denounced his methods as "barbaric lawlessness" because they did not conform to classical canons. It is significant, however, that Gottsched's literary influence soon declined; while about the middle of the eighteenth century, Lessing, the famous critic and dramatist, declared with some boldness that Shakespeare was superior to Corneille, Racine, and Voltaire, and, in fact, to every poet, ancient or modern, with the single exception of Sophocles.

Shakespeare had not been dead fifty years before his plays were being performed in Germany. Companies of English actors toured northern Europe in the seventeenth century, as indeed they had done during the poet's own lifetime; and the English drama was made familiar to Germans, Danes, and Dutch. In the early days Shakespeare's works were given in English, but it was not long before German translations, crude at first, began to make them genuinely popular. In the latter part of the eighteenth century a number of excellent German versions appeared, which had a profound influence on the Romantic Movement in Germany. Goethe, himself a man of genius and the recognised master of the romanticists, was early inspired with a burning enthusiasm for Shakespeare, and acknowledged him as the greatest

factor in the development of romantic drama and poetry. Schlegel, an initiator of the new school, is still regarded as among the most perceptive and penetrating of all Shakespearean critics. His rendering of the plays in German is considered one of the finest examples of successful poetic translation.

Among other great figures of German literature, who paid homage to the Stratford poet, is the poet and journalist, Heinrich Heine, who visited England in 1827 and witnessed a performance of " The Merchant of Venice " at Drury Lane. Born himself of Jewish parents, he was much impressed by the genius that went to the conception of the character of Shylock. In fact, Heine had only one fault to find with Shakespeare—that he was an Englishman. Few more valuable contributions to Shakespearean criticism have been made than that of the famous philosopher, Hermann Ulrici, whose work, " On Shakespeare's Dramatic Art," was published in 1839. Another learned German critic was Gervinus, the gifted literary historian. Shakespeare was his favourite poet, and his great commentary upon him was issued in 1849–52. It is impossible to list all the world-famous names in the realm of German literature who have accorded unstinted praise to the national poet of England. So intense has been the feeling that in some cases strenuous efforts have been made to give the Warwickshire lad a Teutonic origin.

It is not the custom nowadays for us in England to regard the French theatrical taste as fastidious. Yet it was a dislike of the coarseness in Shakespeare that rendered his plays unpopular when they were first introduced into France in the seventeenth century. The critics did not take into consideration the low

moral standards of Elizabethan times, nor make allowances for the vulgar demands of the audience for whom Shakespeare was writing. They admitted his wonderful powers of imagination, his facility of expression, and his deep knowledge of human nature, but his lewdness repelled them. This attitude was strengthened by Voltaire, who, while agreeing that the English drama owed all to the poet, deprecated his lapses from good taste and severely criticised his construction. In this last point Voltaire undoubtedy fastened upon the chief weakness of Shakespeare as a dramatic writer, but it was unfortunate that his views should have deprived his countrymen for some years of the poetry, characterisation, and human understanding of the master poet.

In the eighteenth century the first good translation of Shakespeare into French appeared, and consequently his works began for the first time to be widely known. The more they were read, the more they were admired, in spite of the fact that the poet had a natural racial antipathy to France. The novelist, Madame de Stael, the authoress, George Sand, and the poet and playwright, Alfred de Musset, with others among the French romanticists, praised the English poet to the skies. But the appreciation that redounded most to the credit of Shakespeare, because it came from the greatest literary genius which the world had known since Shakespeare's own day, was the homage of Victor Hugo. In 1864, Hugo published his magnificent volume, "William Shakespeare," which he had intended to be a preface to the admirable translation of the works into French by his son. In it genius recognised genius, and the one enthroned the other for ever in the appreciation of France, not only among

men of letters and great actors and actresses, whose enthusiasm was already unbounded, but with the whole of that cultured people.

For many decades the depreciation of Shakespeare by Voltaire killed any interest that cultivated Italians might have taken in the poet of England. It was only when Italy remarked the increasing approbation with which his works were being studied in Germany that her own novelists and playwrights began to re-write and imitate him. When once the Italians commenced to make themselves familiar with the plays, they found to their intense satisfaction a sincere and generous appreciation of Italian culture and scholarship. They found, further, an extensive knowledge of their national characteristics, and no less than five plays in which the scenes were laid wholly in their own country with the local colour faithfully reproduced—"The Merchant of Venice," "The Taming of the Shrew," "Romeo and Juliet," "Much Ado about Nothing," and "Two Gentlemen of Verona." In other plays Italian settings were introduced, while ancient Rome was the central scene of the magnificent Roman dramas. Their history, authors, character, and scenery were, Italians found, familiar to Shakespeare; and they have returned the compliment, not only by numerous translations during the past century, but by the production of his dramas on the Italian stage for 150 years past.

From Germany Shakespeare's fame spread to Russia. The German princess, who became the Empress Catherine II of Russia, was a friend of Voltaire and took pride in encouraging the arts at her court. She herself enjoyed the reputation of possessing a great love of literature, and was certainly a generous patron

of poet, painter, and musician. She wrote herself, and was so imbued with admiration of Shakespeare that she composed a drama on Oleg, an early Russian prince, which she attempted to model on the Shakespearean Chronicle play. It is related that Catherine witnessed a performance in German of "The Merry Wives of Windsor." She was so pleased with it that she caused a Russian version to be written, in which Windsor became St. Petersburg and Falstaff, Iakov Vlasievitch Polkadov. Since Catherine's day the complete works of Shakespeare have been translated into the Russian tongue.

By the end of the nineteenth century Shakespeare could be read in German, French, Italian, Spanish, Dutch, Danish, Swedish, Hungarian, Bohemian, Russian, and Polish; and in most civilised countries his dramas had been produced with success on the stage and engaged the study of leading actors and men of letters.

The people of the United States of America, descended from the same stock as the English themselves, regard Shakespeare with legitimate pride as the greatest of their ancestors. They consider that he belongs to them no less than to us. The first American edition of the poet's works appeared only a few years after the close of the War of Independence. Many other editions there have been, notably the Harvard edition of Boston, edited by that very able commentator, Rev. H. N. Hudson. Among American literary men we find a love of Shakespeare such as filled the hearts of Victor Hugo, Goethe, and the European geniuses. Particularly is this so of Emerson whose favourite reading was poetry and whose favourite poet was Shakespeare.

Already in the colonial period Shakespeare was being performed on the American stage. The first production of "Hamlet," for example, took place as long ago as 1759, when Lewis Hallam acted the part in Philadelphia. Other great Shakespearean actors of the United States were Thomas Abthorpe Cooper, Edward Loomis Davenport, and Edwin Forrest. The greatest of them all, however, was Edwin Booth, whose interpretations have been rarely equalled on either side of the Atlantic. Among the actresses the name of Charlotte Saunders Cushman is still honoured for the remarkable success she achieved in the parts of Lady Macbeth and Queen Katharine.

Reviewing the unbounded admiration for Shakespeare that has come from the cultured classes of all nations, listening to the homage paid by men who are themselves geniuses, realising the universality of his appeal, how can we doubt that the Warwickshire poet is the greatest of all Englishmen? Every year foreigners flock to this country to make the pilgrimage to the town of his origin. On his birthday the flags of no less than sixty-five nations have been unfurled in his honour in the streets of Stratford. No one, no king, conqueror, or statesman, has done so much to make England known to the world at large, has heaped upon her such honour, has made her name so glorious, as the humble poet, who bowed deferentially before princes and nobles without an inkling of his own greatness.

The Struggles of Genius

Although the great genius, be he poet, painter, or musician, is the man who brings the most fame and honour to his country, he has often been compelled to struggle hard to win a bare subsistence for himself. Some of those, who have since been proved the greatest sons of their race, were allowed by the indifference of their fellow-countrymen to end their days in misery and want. It is a distressing thought that masterpieces, which realise to-day thousands upon thousands of pounds, would have been gladly exchanged by their authors for food and shelter. The picture of the genius working in his garret in the most heart-rending, necessitous circumstances, is no fanciful one. History has records of many such cases, and some of the world's greatest artists are numbered among their ranks. Few things are more poignantly tragic than the tardy recognition of genius, long years after its mortal temple has been laid in the grave.

It is a test of true genius that lack of reward and appreciation is no detriment. The inspired artist must express himself, even to a world that is deaf and blind. Typical examples are found in the cases of the neglected painters of the early Dutch School, and the struggling musicians of Germany. Ignored and penniless, and disgracefully paid even when their gifts were recognised, they continued to pour forth the priceless gems of their inspiration in one unending stream. Prodigality is particularly characteristic of the great composer, whose genius appears to thrive on

constant activity. It is well that the touch of the divine in such great men is so altruistic, for had output been regulated by personal gain, the world's masterpieces would be considerably rarer than they are.

To record all instances where genius has met with coldness, injustice, meanness, denial, would be impossible; and if possible, would be tedious. A few of the more glaring examples may be quoted to show how the talented in each field of art have been made to suffer through lack of reward and encouragement.

To take the realm of music first, no more pathetic case is recorded than that of the wonderful genius, Mozart. The great composer held the post of concert-master to Archbishop Hieronymus of Salzburg. But the position was an honorary one, and Mozart's sole source of income was derived from his compositions. He wrote some magnificent operas and a host of other musical works, but the pecuniary gain was so small that he was compelled to ask leave of absence from the Archbishop in order to conduct a concert tour to improve his exchequer. His patron was furious, describing the tour as an indefensible "system of begging." Nevertheless, Mozart was constrained to go, and pressed for the necessary permission. The tour was so disappointing that the musician was faced with no means at all of supporting himself and was forced to the indignity of praying the Archbishop to make his post a salaried one. After much demur, an ungracious consent was extracted, and the sum of Fifty Pounds a year agreed upon.

Two years later the genius of Mozart most generously responded to this meagre emolument by producing "Idomeneo," the finest opera that the world had yet known. Fame came to the composer, but it did not improve his financial circumstances. The Archbishop

was proud to have an artist of such reputation in his service and derived peculiar satisfaction from insulting him openly; he made him feed with his servants, who were encouraged to treat him with complete lack of respect. The crowning injustice was a reduction in his miserable salary from £50 to £40, and a refusal to allow him to play anywhere beyond the Archbishop's palace.

Even the meek and mild Mozart could not submit to such treatment. He left the Archbishop's service, took lodgings in Vienna, and hunted for pupils. He failed to make a living in this way, but, fortunately, the Emperor of Austria had heard of his remarkable abilities and gave him certain commissions. On the strength of them he married Constance Weber, but she was as unthrifty as he, and their position became desperate.

Masterpieces continued to flow from Mozart's mind. "Le Nozze di Figaro" was produced in 1786 and killed by jealous intrigue. The discouraged composer went to Prague, where the magnificent "Don Giovanni" was written for a fee of less than £50. He returned to Vienna on being appointed chamber-composer to the Emperor at £80 a year. There were no fixed duties attached to the post, and Mozart once observed, when giving a receipt for his wages, "Too much for what I do; too little for what I could do." Though his royal patron was a genuine admirer of Mozart, it did not, it seems, occur to him that musicians, like other human beings, have to live. The salary was scarcely enough to pay the rent of the composer's abode. Other patrons of high rank were equally unsympathetic. They made him handsome presents of watches, when he needed cash to buy food.

In 1789 King Frederick William II of Prussia made

the first generous offer that Mozart had ever received. He invited him to take the chapel-master's vacancy at his court in return for a salary of £450 a year. Mozart asked the Emperor for leave to resign. The answer was reproachful. "Are you going to desert me, then?" asked Joseph. Mozart felt rebuked, refused the Prussian offer, and stayed on in Vienna to starve.

In association with the theatrical manager, Schikaneder, Mozart decided to produce a new type of opera, and his glorious "Zauberflöte" was the result. It was a triumph. Mozart was covered with honour, but the cash profits were pocketed by Schikaneder. Overworked at this period by incessant composition, the "Requiem," the coronation music for the new Emperor Leopold, and other pieces occupying his whole day, the composer overtaxed his strength and died on 5th December 1791.

It might be imagined that since Vienna had persuaded him to stay, sacrificing his own betterment for her delectation, Vienna would have looked after him. Not so. The day after his death, Mozart's body was taken with indecent haste to a pauper's grave. The few so-called friends, who followed the corpse, turned back because it was raining; and the great genius was lowered into his ignominious resting-place without a soul to do him honour.

Prominent among other tragic figures of music is Beethoven. He came of a poor family; and when yet in his teens, his small earnings were his family's only means of support. The terrible affliction of deafness hovers like a black shadow over the career of the master. He repelled the challenging thoughts of suicide, resolved, whatever he suffered, to give to the world the fruits of his genius. At the end of his life he was in straitened circumstances; and it is

pleasant to recall that the London Philharmonic Society organised a concert for his benefit, and sent an advance cheque of one hundred pounds. In 1827 he was staying with his brother, who refused him even a fire in his room and sent him back to Vienna in an open chaise in the worst of weathers. He caught a chill which proved fatal; and this supreme genius passed away with blessings upon the English as almost his last words.

Mean, almost disgraceful, was the treatment which the world meted out to Schubert, the greatest of its song-writers. He was compelled to waste precious years of his short life in the drudgery of teaching small children in his father's school. Every spare moment he gave to composition, and his output was enormous in spite of the call of his scholastic duties. In 1816 an admirer of his work offered him a free share of his lodgings, and Schubert was able to leave his hated teaching and devote himself entirely to music. He composed a ceremonial cantata for which he was paid four pounds—the first money ever received by him for a composition. Although his industry was wonderful and musical ideas flowed from him in one unbroken stream of beauty, Schubert was penniless and lived on the generosity of his friends. His efforts to interest the music publishers in his work was not only unavailing, but even exposed him to gratuitous insults. When they were persuaded at last to accept some of his songs on account of his growing reputation among the cultured Viennese, the prices they paid for them were ludicrous. Schubert tried to enter the world of the theatre, but disappointment rewarded all his efforts. Pressure was brought to bear upon publishers by the increasing circle of his admirers, and from 1825 onwards the stress of poverty was relieved. His prolific genius,

however, was pouring forth more and more, and the pecuniary return was hopelessly inadequate. Worst of all, Schubert was near the end of his short life, for he died at his brother's house after a brief illness in 1828, aged thirty-one. The publishers who held many of his manuscripts regarded them as little more than waste paper ; and many of his finest works were only rescued from oblivion by the enterprise of Sir Arthur Sullivan and Sir George Grove, who visited Vienna for the purpose in 1867.

Exploring the realm of painting, we find the great masters faced with as bitter a struggle as that experienced by the geniuses of music. Gifted artists in all countries, in every age, have suffered from neglect, lack of recognition, and insufficient return for their labour. Perhaps there is no more striking instance than the treatment of the great men of the brilliant Dutch school of the seventeenth century. Here are names that are reverenced to-day the world over. Only public institutions and millionaires can afford to buy their pictures. Yet many of them died in destitution and were buried in pauper graves. (Holland, although a small country, is rich in art, and has produced some of the world's greatest painters.)

Rembrandt, the master portrait-painter, has been called the Shakespeare of Holland—an appropriate title, for the honour and glory which he has shed upon his country by the works of his brush are comparable to those brought to England by the plays of the dramatist. Although Rembrandt was acknowledged to be the shining light of his age, he was allowed to end his days in penury. Wars and troubles at home made money scarce in Holland, and the great painter had to borrow to try to keep his head above water. He failed, was declared bankrupt, driven from his house, and stripped

of all his possessions. It is true that he had been guilty of indiscretions, but it is tragic to think of this world-famous painter spending his last years in a miserable lodging in the Ghetto, and even there producing masterpieces whose value to-day would buy a palace.

Frans Hals, second only to Rembrandt in the field of portraiture, was forced to sell his pictures and furniture to pay his baker. So desperate did his circumstances become that the municipality of Haarlem supplied his rent and fuel. After his death, his widow was relieved by the guardians of the poor and eventually died in a hospital. It was many years before Hals' pictures were considered of high value, but to-day £25,000 has been paid for a single work.

Jacob Ruysdael and Hobbema, the two men who brought the art of Dutch landscape-painting to its final state of perfection, never received a sufficient return for their work. Ruysdael died in an almshouse, and Hobbema was buried among the paupers of Amsterdam. Some great artists, like Nicolas Poussin, the towering figure of France in the seventeenth century, had a grim fight with poverty at the commencement of their careers and were only carried to victory by the urge of an irrepressible genius. The Italians appear to have treated their great painters with more generosity and appreciation than other peoples; and Leonardo da Vinci, Michael Angelo, Titian, and Raphael lived in comfortable circumstances and were honoured as very great men during their own lifetime.

The master genius, it must be admitted, is frequently unthrifty, careless, unbusinesslike in money matters, and indiscreet, sensual, and reckless in his social relations. Often it is his own fault that his difficulties

become so overwhelming. Nevertheless, much may be forgiven the one who himself gives so much to mankind, while it cannot be denied that in numerous cases the reward of effort has been totally inadequate. Such observations occur naturally to the mind as we return to literature and consider a typical case of unrewarded talent in the life story of Robert Burns.

The national poet of Scotland was compelled all his days to struggle against adversity. So poor was his father, that even the cheap educational facilities of the Scottish system were denied him. He has told us how he read his books at meal-times and carried a volume into the fields in the hope that he might snatch a minute or two from his tasks as a ploughboy to study. Burns, while engaged in different kinds of uncongenial and unremunerative toil, wrote the whole time, his charming verses coming from him with an ease and spontaneity that were the marks of true genius. In 1786 his first volume of poems was published at Kilmarnock. It was an immediate and remarkable success. Containing, as it did, some of his best-known songs, it brought him fame and popularity in abundance, but only Twenty Pounds in cash. The poet went to Edinburgh, where he was received with sincere compliment and genuine admiration by the literary world and cultured society. But all this adulation did not improve his worldly circumstances. When his triumphant introduction to the Scottish capital was over, he entered a humble lodging, which he shared with a writer's apprentice at three shillings a week.

In 1787 a second edition of Burns's poems produced Four Hundred Pounds for him, but in the next year an unfortunate farming venture swallowed all he had. He became an excise officer at the moderate salary of

Fifty Pounds a year. In 1791 he contributed to George Thomson's "Select Collection of Original Scottish Airs with Symphonies and Accompaniments for the Pianoforte and Violin: the poetry by Robert Burns." The poet's contribution was one hundred songs, some of which are now sung from end to end of the world. His reward was a shawl for his wife and Five Pounds! He never wrote for money again. His health broke up; and four years later he approached his cousin for a loan of Ten Pounds to avoid spending his last days in gaol for debt. The greater part of his work was published posthumously; and it was left for others to enrich themselves out of the products of his genius. The poet who sang of the national life of Scotland is honoured by his fellow-countrymen as few national poets are honoured. But in his lifetime society ostracised him for his revolutionary opinions and his exposure of old-time prejudices and affectations. It refused to condone his faults and thereby added to them; and it allowed the man, who has made Scotland better known than any other of her sons, to watch the shadow of the prison steal across his death-bed.

Another striking instance of undeserved misfortune is that of Carlo Goldoni, the founder of modern Italian comedy in the eighteenth century. His early studies for the law prevented him from indulging his desire to write plays; and when he was able to do so, he did not at first find his particular forte. He wasted time on tragedy, when he was a born writer of comedy. Goldoni composed with extreme facility and once wrote sixteen comedies within twelve months, some of them among his best work. He was disgracefully exploited by the theatrical managers, who opposed the suggestion to grant him a pension because they feared that his output would shrink and their own profits diminish.

As a poor man he was in the power of these greedy commercialists, whose interest in genius is always limited to the amount of money they can make out of it. During the latter part of his life Goldoni was attached to the French court of Louis XVI, and his position became an enviable one. But the revolution reduced him to beggary, when it took away the pension which the royal favour had brought to him. His case was so pitiable that it moved even the hard hearts of the new masters of France. The Convention restored his pension—the day after his death !

The unhappy tale of literary genius ignored, unrecognised, or shamefully exploited by publishers could be continued at length. Cervantes, the famous Spanish man of letters, whose "Don Quixote" is now a classic in almost every tongue, became financially entangled, was imprisoned in Seville goal, and experienced a time of acute poverty. Torquato Tasso, the famed Italian poet, was confined for years in a madhouse by the Duke of Ferrara, who mistook the irritability and passion of a highly-strung nature for evidence of insanity. Voltaire found every possible obstacle placed in his path by his father, who wished to make a lawyer of him and attempted to paralyse all his literary activities.

English literature is also rich in tragedies. The fall of Milton, secretary to Cromwell and the great poet of freedom, is a sad chapter. The Restoration deprived him of wealth, position, and influence, and came near to depriving him of life itself. For a time it was not safe for him to walk about the streets ; and when the feeling against his republicanism had subsided, he found himself poor, old, blind and helpless, with three undutiful daughters on his hands. A third marriage improved his home surroundings, but publicly

he was still a fallen star. Yet in these unhappy circumstances that transcendent work of genius, "Paradise Lost," was written. For some time Milton could find no publisher to take it up. This was due principally to his political record, for people could not forget how ardently he had supported the Cromwellian cause. It was also true, however, that the great fire of 1666 had completely disorganised London business. Eventually Samuel Simmons of Aldersgate Street condescended to buy the copyright for Five Pounds down, with the promise of another Five Pounds when the first edition of 1,300 copies had been sold. Further payments of a similar amount were to follow the disposal of the third and fourth editions respectively. For this return Milton surrendered all his rights in one of the world's greatest masterpieces. The blind poet was far from penniless when he died, but his estate was sadly reduced when compared with the days of his prosperity as a servant of the Commonwealth. The people of England, blinded by political hatred, could not place a true value upon his literary genius. Had popular excitement been allowed free rein, Milton would have fallen on the scaffold years before "Paradise Lost," "Paradise Regained," and "Samson Agonistes" were written.

Against difficulties of all sorts English literary genius has had to struggle. Sometimes the fault has rested with the obstinate refusal of contemporaries to recognise ability. Sometimes the author himself has contributed largely to his own undoing by extravagance, indiscretion, dissipation, or kindred faults. In other cases misfortune in the shape of sickness and disease has silenced a genius after a life that was all too brief. Such a tragedy was the end of Keats, who was killed by a pulmonary disease at

the age of twenty-six. Shelley's atheism drew such obloquy upon him that it was not considered respectable to be found reading his poems, and the beauty of his work was unknown to all except a select few. Only after he had died at the early age of thirty did the world begin to realise that a rare genius had passed away. Byron's faults and absence abroad caused him to be depreciated as a poet at home, although he was considered by other nations to be the greatest of English writers after Shakespeare.

Financial difficulties are those which have most commonly beset the literary genius. These have arisen either from an insufficient monetary reward or an inability of the artistic mind to grapple successfully with business problems. Oliver Goldsmith, who, in the "Vicar of Wakefield," "She Stoops to Conquer," and "The Deserted Village," wrote the finest novel, the finest play, and the finest poem of his day, died £2,000 in debt. It is true he was a gambler, but he was also liberal to a fault; and it is pathetic to think of a man of his attainments and achievements in such severe pecuniary straits. A recent sale of some of his manuscripts produced enough to pay the debt many times over. Similar anxieties clouded the end of Sheridan's life. We may not be able to exonerate him from all charges of improvidence and business incapacity, but a man who has amused millions of his fellows by "The School for Scandal" and other brilliant plays should not have ended his days worried by creditors and depressed by disappointments. Coleridge had an equally unhappy end, and was forced to depend on the generosity of friends.

Tardy recognition has often been the depressing fate of men of talent. George Gissing, the novelist, had a life-long struggle with poverty and wrote

brilliantly of its brutalising influence on the sensitive mind. Only a limited circle, however, appreciated the high quality of his work. James Thomson, the British poet, lived a life shrouded in pessimism and disillusionment. He existed in single rooms in Pimlico and Bloomsbury—all that his wretched competence could procure for him. He died before he was fifty at University College Hospital in Gower Street and was buried in unconsecrated ground at Highgate. Posthumous praise always strikes a note of pathos, particularly when—as in the case of Samuel Butler, author of "The Way of All Flesh"—an artist has sighed in vain for the applause of his fellow-beings. Some have struggled all their lives for recognition, only to achieve it when they are full of years. W. H. Hudson, the naturalist, has a memorial panel and a bird sanctuary in Hyde Park, but most of his days were spent in fighting lack of means and ill-health, and his wife kept a boarding-house to support them. So belated was his prosperity, that a modest civil pension was granted him, which he afterwards resigned. The life-story of Joseph Conrad, again, reveals an uphill fight against public apathy, which almost paralysed his pen. He was well past middle age when his books began to sell widely in England and America.

The world has not been kind to its men of genius. The poets, authors, artists, and musicians, rising to the highest planes to which the human mind can aspire, conferring the most coveted honours upon their country, have often been denied the bare necessities of existence and excluded from recognition and applause until they are lying in their graves.

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